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H. W. Longfellow

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HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE

BY

CHARLES ELIOT NORTON

***TOGETHER WITH LONGFELLOW'S CHIEF
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEMS***



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NOTE

The proposed commemoration, under the auspices of the Cambridge Historical Society, on the 27th of February, 1907, of the one hundredth anniversary of Longfellow's birthday, accounts for the character of this little volume. Besides the sketch of the life of the Poet, it contains most of those of his shorter poems which are referred to in the narrative, and also those which have a distinctly auto-biographical character, and those which relate to his special friends and to the places of his birth and abode. Thus, the little book gives the story of the Poet's life briefly narrated in prose by a friend, and partially recorded in verse by himself.



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NOTE

The frontispiece portrait of Longfellow in 1842 is from the original painting by G. P. A. Healy in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The autograph, from a letter dated 1840, is in the Charles Folsom Collection, Boston Public Library. The portrait which faces page 42 is from a photograph taken in 1879. The autograph, is from a letter dated 1880.

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At the beginning of the nineteenth century New England was a good land in which to be born. It was still sparsely settled. There were no large towns. Boston, the largest, had scarcely twenty-five thousand inhabitants. The people were homogeneous, of unmixed English stock. They were mainly farmers or seamen. They were intelligent, industrious, and religious. There was great equality of condition, none were very rich, none very poor. Everybody was well off, for the poorest were free from the fear of oppression or starvation. The relations between man and man were natural and friendly. The general habits of life were simple and frugal; but even in the smaller towns there were often a few families which maintained a traditional comparatively high standard of refinement, of intellectual culture, and of moderate though genuine elegance.

There was never a more truly democratic community, nor one in which the advantages

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and opportunities of a society based upon democratic principles were more fully and freely enjoyed. Its interests were, indeed, comparatively narrow, for it had small share in the great life of the world, it had little consciousness of relation to the historic past even of its own race, and it seemed to have inherited few of its burdens. It had separated itself from the Old World, and was possessed with the spirit of its own independence. It was full of self-confidence, and looked forward into the future with an unbounded hope, which appeared even to the wisest not an illusion, but to rest on a solid foundation of reason. Here men held possession of a field in which to show what they could do unhampered by hereditary prescriptions and privileges, and here, in New England especially, the new order of society, based on justice and liberty, not only gave promise of fairer results than had ever before been achieved, but already exhibited actual results in blessings which seemed but a foretaste of those which might be legitimately anticipated. It is not strange that the whole temper of the community became optimistic

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and kindly; that the severities of the Calvinistic creed of earlier days were relaxed; and that both this world and the next took on a Utopian aspect.

The perils of prosperity, of unlimited democracy, of unchecked immigration, were not foreseen; they were gradually to manifest themselves. The generation which grew up before 1830 had neither the experience nor the dread of them.

This condition of society in New England deserves to be set forth in much greater detail, not only as an exceptional, instructive, and interesting passage in the history of mankind, but also as accounting in large measure for the spirit and form of the works of the poets and men of letters who gave distinction to the country in the middle of the century. It is worth noting that all of them were born within its first twenty years, and grew to manhood before the problems which now perplex us had begun to present themselves with the threatenings of the Sphinx.¹

¹ The list with its dates is curiously significant: Emerson, born 1803; Hawthorne, 1804; Longfellow and Whittier, 1807; Holmes,

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One of the pleasantest towns in New England at this time was Portland, now the chief seaport of the State of Maine. It is an old town according to the reckoning of the United States, having been first settled in 1632; it is old enough to have traditions, and to have known many generations of seafaring men, and in former days, when its commerce was of more importance than it is now, its people gained some sense, such as those of inland towns seldom acquire, of the largeness of the world, of the interest and romance of foreign lands, and of the mystery and perils of the sea. Here on the 27th of February, 1807, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born. His parents were of English stock, long settled in America. His father was a lawyer, a man of pure, upright character, a good heart, and an old-time courtesy. He became one of the foremost men in his community, honored for his public spirit, sound judgment, integrity, and ability.

1809 ; Lowell, 1819. The general spirit and optimistic disposition of the land had already found expression in Irving, born 1783, and in Channing (1780), but the original characteristic New England quality, the distinctive temper of a cultivated democracy, waited for its full expression for the men of the succeeding generation.

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"In his family," wrote his youngest son, "he was at once kind and strict, bringing up his children in habits of respect and obedience, of unselfishness, the dread of debt, and the faithful performance of duty."¹ The boy's mother must have been a woman of uncommon sweetness and charm. Her letters, of which a few have been preserved, mainly to her son, are evidences of her tenderness, refinement, and culture. She was a lover of nature, and of the poets; she had a sincere and cheerful piety; she was a kind neighbor and a devoted mother. Her household of eight children, four brothers and four sisters, was a happy one. Henry was the second child.

To those who have not had the blessing of knowing it, it may be difficult to give the true impression of the pleasantness and wholesomeness of an old-time New England home. There has never elsewhere been anything exactly like it. The natural relations shaping the society of which it was an element, the absence of arti-

¹ I take this sentence from the excellent Life of the poet by his brother, the late Rev. Samuel Longfellow. My obligations to this authoritative biography are constant throughout the following sketch.

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ficial distinctions, the universal sense of independence and ease, the common kindness and good-nature which resulted from the general well-being, all affected the intimate spirit of the household. Domestic virtues flourish in such an atmosphere. The union of simplicity in modes of living and thinking with respect and desire for culture showed itself in a love of reading, by which the narrow outlook of a somewhat primitive and provincial view of the world was modified and enlarged. It was through books that the household mainly felt its connection with the wide life of mankind, with the poetic and historic past. The books were indeed comparatively few, but they were for the most part those of which the worth had been tested by the approval of many generations. Music, too, of a simple kind was one of the common domestic pleasures. Manners were carefully regarded; and though there was little of the finer social art, there was often much good talk to be heard around the hospitable table, or by the winter-evening fireside. In fact, the old New England home at its best was a happy place, with a special, if slender,

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charm and grace of its own. There was, indeed, a lack of richness in the intellectual no less than in the material life, and seldom a sufficient variety of condition, or difficulty of circumstance, or collision of interests to develop the finer resources of the mind. The land had not been settled long enough to possess a soil — the product of the lives of countless generations — of depth enough to afford nourishment to the deepest reaching roots of the imagination and intelligence.

Such a home as I have described was that of the Longfellows, and its influence was strong for good on a sensitive nature like that of the boy Henry. He was a bright, pleasant boy, active, industrious, ardent, and according to his mother's report "remarkably solicitous always to do right." When he was five years old he was sent to a day-school, close by his homé, and a certificate from his master has been preserved, given him when he was not much over six, which shows how early the little boy began to be what he always remained: "Master Henry Longfellow is one of the best boys we have in school. He spells and reads

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very well. He also can add and multiply numbers. His conduct last quarter was very correct and amiable. June 30, 1813."

His taste for reading was early manifest. He took delight in "Don Quixote" and in Ossian, but, as he himself has recorded, the first book which "fascinated his imagination, and excited and satisfied the desires of his mind," was the "Sketch-Book" of Washington Irving. "I was a schoolboy when it was published" [the first number appeared in 1819], "and read each succeeding number with ever increasing wonder and delight." He had himself already begun writing, and when he was thirteen years old some verses of his were printed in the local newspaper. They were of no special promise, but they were not destitute of merit in versification, and showed that the boy had been reading Campbell and Scott. With these verses his literary life began.

In 1822 he was sent to Bowdoin College at Brunswick, then, as now, the chief college in Maine, about thirty miles from Portland. He entered it as a Sophomore, in a class of which Hawthorne was a member. His college

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years were well spent; it was a period of rapid • maturing both of character and of powers. Longfellow, as he had been at school, so here was “one of the best boys.” He had a charming social disposition, and was a general favorite; but, while he enjoyed the companionship of his fellows, he had principles strong enough to resist the temptations of college life. He was a faithful and industrious student; he became a wide reader; and he wrote much prose and verse, some of which found acceptance in the “United States Literary Gazette,” published in Boston, to which he became, during his last year in college, a frequent contributor. The poems are mostly trial pieces. They show a singularly sweet and pure nature; but the poet had not yet found his true voice, and what he wrote was often in the mood and with the tone of elder poets, especially of Bryant, whose grave and moral verse, the expression of his New England temperament, exercised a strong and acknowledged influence upon his younger contemporary. The best poetic fruit of his college years was not gathered till fifty years later, when, on the anni-

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versary of the graduation of his Class, Longfellow read at Bowdoin his beautiful and characteristic poem entitled *Morituri Salutamus*, in which, beginning with tender recollections of the days of youth, he went on with a profoundly sweet and touching survey of life, and closed with a noble assertion of the significance and opportunities of old age.

Before he left college he had come to a clear recognition of his true vocation in life. "The fact is," he wrote to his father, "the fact is, I most eagerly aspire after future eminence in literature. . . . Nature has given me a very strong predilection for literary pursuits." And in this he was not making the mistake which young men so often make, of supposing their powers to justify their predilection. He had a right to confidence in his gifts, and Fortune smiled upon him with surprising graciousness. At the very moment of his graduation, in 1825, the Board of Trustees of the college determined to establish a Professorship of Modern Languages. The resources of the college were narrow, and the salary which it was proposed to attach to the

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professorship was too small to allow the hope, that a scholar of established repute could be induced to take the chair. "The eyes of the trustees," says his brother, "turned upon the young graduate, whose literary tastes and attainments had attracted their attention and gained him reputation." His character, no less than his attainments, inspired confidence in his ability, after due preparation, to fill such a position with credit, and an informal proposal was made to him that he should visit Europe for a period of preparatory study, with the understanding that on his return he should be appointed to the professorship. There could be no stronger evidence of the impression which, though not yet nineteen years old, he had already made as a youth, not merely of uncommon promise, but of still more uncommon desert.

The proposal was accepted with delight. Nothing could have better favored his desires and his projects. The opportunity of study in Europe was an unexpired-felicity, and he embraced it with a serious resolve to get from it the best that it could give. He left home

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in May, 1826, and he remained abroad till July, 1829.

Europe was then much more remote from America than it is to-day. It was a month or more distant, and it was a much fresher land then than now to a young American. Its paths had not yet been made dusty by American feet. In outward aspect, in social order, in standards of life, in modes of thought, the Old and the New World were far more distinct than they have since become. The great advantage which an American still derives from a visit to Europe, beside the enlarging of his experience of life, is the quickening of his imagination by the awakening of the sense of his relation to the long historic life of his race. Longfellow's youth and poetic temperament, as well as the literary culture which he had already acquired, made him peculiarly sensible to the strong and novel influence of a residence in foreign lands. His first months abroad were spent in France, and thence he went in succession to Spain, Italy, and Germany, ending his period of absence with a brief stay in England. Everywhere on the Con-

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tinent he devoted himself to acquiring the languages of the different countries which he visited, and to studying their literature. He had an exceptional facility in learning a new language, and his industry was great. He mastered three of the four great foreign languages so thoroughly as to speak them with facility and correctness, and to write them with comparative ease, and he returned to America fitted to discharge competently the duties of the professorship to which he had been called. But Europe had done much more for him than merely make him an accomplished scholar. It had enlarged his view of life, fertilized his mind, and given him a social cultivation which he could not have gained at home. These three years abroad did much to give color to his future.

To come back from the exciting interests and delights of Paris, Madrid, and Rome, and from the deep sources of intellectual life at a German university, to the monotonous routine of a teacher's existence within the narrow limits of a small country college, was a somewhat sharp test of character. Long-

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fellow stood it well, for his rare gifts and accomplishments rested upon a solid basis of manliness and common sense, and his long residence abroad had not weakened his love of home. He entered on his new duties with zest, and with a high estimate of the responsibilities and opportunities of his profession as teacher. In a letter written in 1830,—he was then twenty-three years old,—he describes the course of his life: “I rise at six in the morning, and hear a French recitation immediately. At seven I breakfast and am then master of my time till eleven, when I hear a Spanish lesson. After that I take a lunch, and at twelve I go into the library” [he was the acting librarian of the college], “where I remain till one. I am then at leisure for the afternoon till five, when I have a French recitation. At six I take coffee, then walk and visit friends till nine; study till twelve, and sleep till six, when I begin the same round again. Such is the daily routine of my life. The intervals of college duty I fill up with my own studies. Last term I was publishing text-books for the use of my pupils, in whom I take a deep in-

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terest. This term I am writing a course of lectures on French, Spanish, and Italian literatures. . . . I am delighted more and more with the profession I have embraced. . . . Since my return I have written one piece of poetry, but have not published a line. . . . If I ever publish a volume it will be many years first."

It was, indeed, nearly ten years before he published his first slender volume of collected poems. But these ten years were well filled with literary work, mainly the result of his travel and his professional studies. He wrote numerous articles upon topics of mediæval and modern literature; he made many poetical translations; he published in 1833 a series of sketches of tales and literary essays under the title of "Outre Mer," and six years later, after a second visit to Europe, appeared "Hyperion," in which this later experience of travel was presented in a more consecutive form than that of his earlier book, and with a deeper interest from the thread of romance connecting its various episodes, as well as from its riper expression of more personal and intimate experience.

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All this work has many excellent qualities; it is the writing of a cultivated man of letters, possessed of poetic sensibility, of a somewhat romantic vein of sentiment, and of a sweet nature, refined, gentle, and of high aims. It is essentially the work of a man of letters, who sees life not directly, but rather as it comes reflected to him through books and colored by literary associations. "Outre Mer" is a lineal descendant of the "Sketch-Book;" "Hyperion" traces back to Jean Paul. The books have not the charm of primitive nature, but they are full of the pleasantness of the garden, with its abundance of sweet-scented herbs and exotic flowers.

It was not strange that Longfellow was slow in discovering his native vein of poetry and in trusting to it. The intellectual conditions of America did not give self-confidence to her authors, and in his case the opening to him, at the most sensitive period of youth, of the treasures of the Continental literatures, treasures much less familiar eighty years ago than now, the excitement of what was practically literary discovery, and the attractiveness of the

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form no less than of the substance of this newly revealed art,— all tended at first to choke the natural current of his poetic vein, and to substitute for the direct expression of himself the reproduction by transfusion or translation of what was so delightful to him.

During these years, from 1827 to 1839, his life had had a varied course. In 1831 he had been married with every promise of happiness to Miss Potter of Portland. In 1834, having established his reputation as an accomplished scholar and teacher, he was invited to succeed Mr. Ticknor, as Professor of Belles-Lettres at Harvard College. He accepted with satisfaction the larger opportunities for study and the wider social relations which a position at the oldest and best equipped of American colleges afforded; but before entering upon his new duties, he went again to Europe for further study, especially of the northern languages and literature. He was accompanied by his wife, but they had been abroad hardly more than six months before her health failed, and she died at Rotterdam, in December, 1835. Longfellow returned home in the

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autumn of 1836, and in December took up his residence in Cambridge, where his home was thenceforth to be till the end of life, a period of more than forty-five years.

Cambridge in 1836 was a pleasant little town, some of the characteristics of which Mr. Lowell has preserved in his picturesque essay, "Cambridge Thirty Years Ago." For so small a town it contained an unusual number of people of considerable intellectual and more or less social culture whom the college brought together upon easy terms. It was a very simple society, conservative in its general spirit, but liberalized by its neighborhood to Boston, which had long possessed an intellectual leadership among the cities of America, and which, as it grew in numbers and in wealth, did not lose its traditional hospitality to thought. The moment was one of moral and mental ferment. The anti-slavery campaign had begun in earnest, and the so-called "transcendental" movement, to which Emerson was beginning to give its best direction, was already, in spite of many extravagances and absurdities, exercising a potent influence of intellectual

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emancipation. Longfellow at once found himself at home in these wider conditions than Bowdoin had afforded. He sympathized with the prevailing liberal temper of his own generation, but he took no leading part in the debates of the times. His disposition had nothing controversial in it. His life soon settled into a pleasant regularity. His college duties were arduous and often irksome, but they left him leisure for his favorite studies, and for the enjoyment of friendly intercourse.

It was at this time that my own acquaintance with Mr. Longfellow began. He was then twenty-nine years old, and I was a boy somewhat more than twenty years younger. But from the first he was a most kind and pleasant friend to me. He was a frequent and familiar visitor at my father's house, and the younger members of the family were as glad as their elders to see him. He entered into the interests of our lives and added to their pleasures. I should not speak of this were it not for the illustration it affords of his nature, and of the affection in which he was held by all, old or young, with whom he was brought into famil-

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iar relation. As life went on his kindness never changed, and now, almost twenty-five years after his death, I look back on the friendship which he gave to me for forty-five years as one of their great blessings. It still is one of the lights of life. I wish I could give to others the true image of him which remains in my heart. It may be learned from his own sweetest verse, for no poet ever wrote with more unconscious and complete sincerity of self-expression.

No profession is at once more depressing and more stimulating than that of the teacher of youth just entering on manhood. The more keenly he sympathizes with them and desires to aid them, the more keenly he feels how far the best that he can do for them falls short of their needs and of his own ideal of service. He would fain save them from errors of which by experience he knows the harm, would fain not only supply them with learning, but inspire them with a love of it by instructing them in its right use for the building of character, as well as for the enlargement of those mental resources which contribute to the permanent

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enjoyment and utility of life. Longfellow's example wrought upon his pupils no less than his words. He stood before them as the pattern of an accomplished man of letters, who exhibited in his life the worth of his own instructions.

His college duties, regular and constant as they were, did not prevent him from carrying on literary work of his own. In the summer of 1839, as I have already mentioned, "Hyperion," begun a year before, was completed and published. It was received with favor; it appealed to the romantic sentiment of youth, and it gratified the taste, natural to American readers, for the varied resources and the poetic suggestion of the Old World.

"Hyperion" marks the close of the first stage of Longfellow's intellectual life, the stage of youthful impressibility and experiment, of uncertainty of aim, of the control of foreign influence on the direction of his powers. The foreign materials of his culture had now been assimilated so as to become vital elements of his genius, and the little volume of poems published in the autumn of 1839 under the

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title of "Voices of the Night" marks the beginning of the stage in which that genius was to find its full and free expression. The Prelude with which the volume opens gives evidence that the poet himself was conscious of the change. He bids farewell to the visions of childhood; no longer what is external shall be his theme, but, adopting the noble injunction of Sidney's Muse, he says to himself, "Look then into thy heart and write," and thenceforth he spoke to the hearts of men. It is not surprising that he had been so long in acquiring trust in his own powers. His modesty, his admiration for the work of contemporary poets in Europe,—Goethe, Manzoni, Victor Hugo,—had made him hesitate. Moreover, in the life of New England there was little to quicken the poetic imagination; its experience was of homespun quality, the element of passion was scanty in the temperament of its people, there was no great opportunity in their relations and habits for marked variety of sentiment and emotion. Our best poetry had been patterned on foreign models. Such fresh and original voices as had tried to

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make themselves heard, had had for the most part but a faint tone, and had been listened to without popular approval. The prevailing spirit was of critical distrust of native powers, a spirit unfavorable for the discovery of a poet either by himself or by others.

But in "Voices of the Night" were poems which appealed at once to the consciousness of the public as expressions of its own hitherto unexpressed interior moods, and dimly recognized ideals. The "Psalm of Life," a voice, as the poet called it, from his inmost heart, proved to be the voice of many hearts. It became instantly popular. Its moral lesson, conveyed in simple but musical verse, was accepted by its readers as the teaching of their own experience which they had failed to formulate for themselves. It was a help and encouragement to depressed souls, a stimulus to the ambitious and the hopeful. The world cares more for morality than for poetry, but it likes to have its moral sentiment expressed in poetic form. Perhaps no verses of the century have had wider acceptance than these. But it was not only their moral tone which secured for

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this and other poems in the volume an immediate cordial reception, but also their beauty of form. His long preparatory studies had made Longfellow such a master of versification as America had not before known, and his art gave a rare charm to his words.

From this time forth Longfellow wrote little prose for publication, his only subsequent prose work being the brief tale of "Kavanagh," a pretty, semi-romantic, semi-realistic story, brightened by touches of humor, and suffused with delicate sentiment. It embodied many fancies and reflections which had long been gathered in his note-books or loosely floating in his brain, but it has no great significance in the record of his intellectual life.

Two years after the publication of the "Voices of the Night," he gathered into another volume the pieces which he had written in the interval, some of which, such as "The Wreck of the Hesperus" and "The Village Blacksmith," became at once and have continued to be favorites of the great public.

In 1842 the regular current of his life was interrupted by a third visit to Europe, under-

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taken for the benefit of his health. The summer was spent at Marienberg, near Boppard on the Rhine. While here he made acquaintance, which ripened into a cordial and permanent friendship, with Ferdinand Freiligrath, then one of the most distinguished of the younger German poets. In October, on his way home, he went to London, where he spent the last weeks of his stay abroad with Dickens, always a most genial and sympathetic host. Dickens was just bringing out his "American Notes," and Longfellow wrote to Sumner of it, "You will read it with delight and, for the most part, approbation. He has a grand chapter on Slavery."

The topic was perilous for a man of letters; the debate upon it had become too hot. Yet Longfellow, on his homeward voyage, wrote a number of poems on Slavery, which he published in a pamphlet soon after his return. They brought upon him harsh denunciation. He was charged with being an Abolitionist, and his popularity as a poet suffered diminution at the North as well as in the slaveholding community. By these poems Longfellow

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had ranged himself in line with his intimate friend, Charles Sumner, then at the beginning of his great anti-slavery career, and he readily accepted such measure of obloquy and of unpopularity as the taking of this position might bring to him.

In 1843, the happiness of his life was renewed and confirmed by his marriage to Miss Frances Appleton, a woman worthy to be a poet's wife. She had great beauty, and a presence of dignity and distinction, the true image of a beautiful nature. He had met her first in Switzerland, six years before, when she was a girl of nineteen, and something of her as she then was, is embodied in the Mary Ashburton of "Hyperion." She brought him abundant means as well as happiness.

Craigie House in Cambridge, a fine old colonial mansion, which had been Washington's headquarters for some months after he took command of the Continental Army in 1775, and in which Longfellow, almost ever since his first coming to Cambridge had had his abode, now became their permanent home. The traditions, the associations, the surround-

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ings of the house well befitted its aspect, while the view upon which it looked toward the southwest across open fields to the Charles, and beyond the river and its marshes to the pleasant hills of Brighton and Brookline, afforded it the setting of an appropriate landscape. Thus fortunate in all externals, the home within was exceptionally happy. The joys of domestic life, the pleasures of social life, found their pattern and example here.

The rare social gifts with which Nature had endowed him, cultivated by his experience in Europe, made Longfellow a delightful host, or guest, or companion. He possessed the first requisite of all fine social art, — a real desire to give pleasure; he was quite free from vanity, and while he was master of large resources in conversation, he did not use them for display, but with the light touch and the kindly humor which give ease and grace to talk. He never uttered a bitter or cynical word. No one enjoyed more than he the beauty and elegance which contribute, nay, which are essential, to the charm of society at its best, and without extravagance or ostentation he se-

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cured them so far as possible in his own surroundings. Like the scholar in the Prelude to the "Tales of a Wayside Inn," he was

"A man of such a genial mood
The heart of all things he embraced,
And yet of such fastidious taste,
He never found the best too good."

It was, indeed, the best company that Longfellow gathered round the hospitable Craigie House table, and pleasanter dinners or suppers were never given than those over which, for many years, Mrs. Longfellow presided with sweet, gracious dignity, and at which the familiar guests were not unworthy of their hosts. Among the most familiar were Lowell, the near neighbor and constant friend; Tom Appleton, the brother of Mrs. Longfellow, the wit, the humorist, possessed, as he with but partial truth complained, of the temperament of genius without the genius; Agassiz, with his fine amplitude of person, intelligence, and sympathy; Felton, the most genial and jovial of professors of Greek; George W. Greene of Rhode Island, a friend from the old days of Longfellow's first visit

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to Rome in 1827; while rarer but always welcome guests were Emerson, Hawthorne, Sumner, Fields, Howells, and now and then Child and George William Curtis, two of the pleasantest and most lovable of men. Strangers of distinction, foreign or native born, found place at a table which culture and good-breeding made cosmopolitan. Longfellow kept his friendships in excellent repair; even those which might seem to an outsider to cost more than they were worth. He was true to what had been; remembrance maintained life in the ashes of the old affection, and he never made his own fame or his many occupations an excuse for disregarding the claims of a dull acquaintance, or of one fallen in the world.

In the peaceful warmth and light of domestic joys and social pleasures, the genius of the poet found its true atmosphere. His voice took on a fuller tone, the range of his expression became wider and its mode more confident, and when in 1847 he published "Evangeline," a longer and more elaborate composition than he had hitherto attempted, his reputation was largely enhanced, and his

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position as the most popular poet of his generation was assured. The picturesque charm, the tender sentiment, the imaginative sympathy, the purity of tone of this sweetest of idyllic poems, are known to all readers of English poetry.

Happy at home, conscious of the ripening of his own powers, in the enjoyment of well-deserved fame, the course of Longfellow's life ran smoothly on. His college duties gave a regular routine to his days, but left him time for his poetic pursuits, and for those occupations and interests to which his disposition most strongly inclined, and in which the fine qualities of his nature were most attractively displayed. He had his share in the common experience of trials and sorrows. The death of one of his little children touched his heart deeply; but now as in the later time of abiding sorrow, as Lowell truly said,—

“the more
Fate tried his bastions, she but forced a door
Leading to sweeter manhood and more sound.”

His journal, printed in the “Life” by his brother, contains the record of the events of

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these fortunate years, while the poems which appeared in 1849 under the title of "The Seaside and the Fireside" reveal the course of his spiritual experience. In the beautiful verses of "Dedication," with which this little volume begins, he addressed the multitude of his known and unknown readers with such frank and cordial recognition of his relation to them as to make them more than ever his friends, and in the noble poem of "The Building of the Ship," which immediately follows the "Dedication," he rendered a great public service, in appealing to the national sentiment of his people with such an inspiring passion of patriotic fervor as quickened faith and strengthened confidence in the already threatened union of the States.

No living poet had now so wide a circle of readers, and his readers could not but entertain for him a sentiment more personal and affectionate than that which any other poet awakened. It was not by depth or novelty of thought that he interested them, nor did he move them by passionate intensity of emotion, or by profound spiritual insight, or by power

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of dramatic representation and interpretation of life. He set himself neither to propound nor to solve the enigmas of existence. No, the briefer poems by which he won and held the hearts of his readers were the expression of simple feeling, of natural emotion, not of exceptional spiritual experience, but of such as is common to men of good intent. In exquisitely modulated verse he continued to give form to their vague ideals, and utterance to their stammering aspirations. In revealing his own pure and sincere nature, he helped others to recognize their own better selves. The strength and simplicity of his moral sentiment made his poems the more attractive and helpful to the mass of men, who care, as I have said, rather for the ethical significance than for the art of poetry; but the beauty of his verse enforced its teaching, and the melody of its form was consonant with the sweetness of its spirit. In the series of delightful stories which year after year he told in the successive parts of "The Wayside Inn," there were few which did not have for motive some wise lesson of life, some doctrine of charity, gentleness, and faith. The

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spirit of humanity, of large hope, of cheerful confidence in good,—this spirit into which he was born, and of which his own nature was one of the fairest outcomes,—this spirit of the New England of the early nineteenth century,—is embodied in his verse.

And the charm which his verse exercised over its readers, especially over its American readers, continued to be enhanced by the variety and abundance of its sources. From Sicily to Norway, from the castles of Spain to the vineyards of France, from the strongholds of the Rhine to the convents of Italy, the poet was everywhere at home, not as a passing guest, but as an intimate familiar with the landscape, the life, and the legends of the land. He begins one of his poems,—

“Sweet the memory is to me
Of a land beyond the sea,”

and he made his readers sharers in the sweet-ness. In thus enlarging the field of vision for his readers, in stimulating their historic imagination, and in quickening their sympathies with their fellows of other lands, Longfellow was unrivalled. His poems were a large con-

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tribution to that world-literature, on which Goethe set such store as the means of bringing the nations into closer relations with each other, by the increase of their mutual understanding and of their common sentiments.

Gratefully as the worth and beauty of his work were generally recognized, Longfellow did not escape from the penalties of success. He had critics who, blinding themselves to the essentially characteristic individuality of his poetry, denied to him the possession of genuine original powers, and sought to discover defects alike in the substance and in the form of his verse. His modest and sensitive nature was hurt by their attacks, but his serenity was little disturbed. The verdict of the more competent judges, no less than that of the uncritical public, went against them, and by degrees the voices of depreciation and detraction became faint and silent.

“The Golden Legend,” “The Song of Hiawatha,” “The Courtship of Miles Standish,” were written and published between 1850 and 1860, and the peaceful, genial, hospitable life ran on in its sunny and prosperous course,

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for the greater part of each year at Craigie House, and during the summer at Newport or Nahant. In 1854 Longfellow resigned his professorship, but happy domestic cares, the frequent company of friends, many social engagements, the ever fresh companionship of books, the writing of poetry, filled the days with various interests and abundant occupation.

On a day in June, 1861, he wrote in his Journal: "A delicious summer-day. Stroll in the sunshine, thanking God." The words are, as it were, the summary of his happy life, and mark its close. On the ninth of July Mrs. Longfellow was in the library with her two little girls, engaged in amusing them by sealing up small packages of their curls which she had just cut off. The windows were open, and the summer air was blowing through the room. A drop of the sealing-wax fell on her light muslin dress and set it on fire. To save her children she fled from them to the hall. Her husband sped from his study to her help. He succeeded in extinguishing the flames but he was severely burned, and for her there was no recovery. The next morning she died.

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Calmly and resolutely Longfellow took up the burden of life. He bore his grief with manliness and silence. The admirable qualities of his nature were never more apparent. By degrees he resumed so far as was possible his old habits of life, but with an ennobled bearing, and unaffected serenity. In February, 1862, he writes in his journal: "The days pass in dull monotony, and having nothing to record I record nothing. A newspaper, a novel, a vain attempt at more serious study, and weariness—that is all." But a week later comes the entry "Translated the beautiful Canto XXV of the *Paradiso*," and there could not have been a more appropriate or more healing task. For the next five years the translation of the "Divine Comedy" was to be his chief occupation, and the main restorative of health. In May, 1867, the work was finished, and on its publication it at once took its place, a place which it is likely to hold, as the most faithful and scholarly of the metrical verses of the poem.

As the years went on Longfellow became to all outward seeming cheerful as of old, and

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with perfect simplicity took his customary delightful part in the society of his friends.

Again the life at Craigie House flowed on in a peaceful current, but it was no longer a summer stream. The light upon it was that of the autumnal sun. Longfellow's fame was steadily widening, and brought with it an ever increasing burden of demands made upon his time and strength by the visits or the letters of a numberless host of strangers. The penalty had its humorous side, but it was none the less a penalty, exacted of the poet by the great democracy of America and England whose hearts he had touched, and who assumed that the notoriety of his works justified the treatment of their author as a public character. His courtesy and kindness were unfailing, and his imaginative sympathy often led him to make sacrifice of his time and strength for the sake of giving pleasure to others. I have told the story before, but it is worth repeating as an illustration of his invincible considerateness for the feelings of men whom the world is apt to rebuff, how one day when I ventured to remonstrate with him for permit-

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ting the devastation of his hours by one of the most pertinacious and undeserving of habitual visitors, he listened with a humorous smile, and then rebuked me by saying, "Why, Charles, who will be kind to him if I am not?"

In 1868, in company with his daughters and other friends, he once more, after an interval of twenty-six years, visited Europe. He was everywhere received with the heartiest welcome, and as a guest of the highest distinction. The universities of Cambridge and of Oxford each gave to him an honorary degree; the Queen summoned him to Windsor; he spent "two happy days with Tennyson;" he made a short visit to Dickens at Gadshill. Expressions of regard and affection flowed in upon him from high and low, and not only in England, but on the Continent as well, he met with constant evidence of honor and regard. He returned to America in the autumn of 1869, and speedily resumed the old habits of life at home. "It is pleasant to get back to it," he wrote, "and yet sad."

He had enjoyed the experience of fame, but adulation and the knowledge of the admira-

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tion in which he was held abroad as well as at home, had not the least effect to quicken vanity or self-consciousness. The essential qualities of his nature preserved him from all evil consequences of flattery. He remained untouched by them, as simple in manner as in heart, intrinsically modest and sound-minded. He was "a man not to be spoiled by prosperity."

The approach of old age did not chill Longfellow's heart or diminish his poetic impulse and skill. The poems in the little volume of "*Ultima Thule*," published in 1880, bore witness that the prayer of the motto from Horace on the title-page had been granted,—the prayer for an old age with unimpaired mind, not without honor nor lacking song.

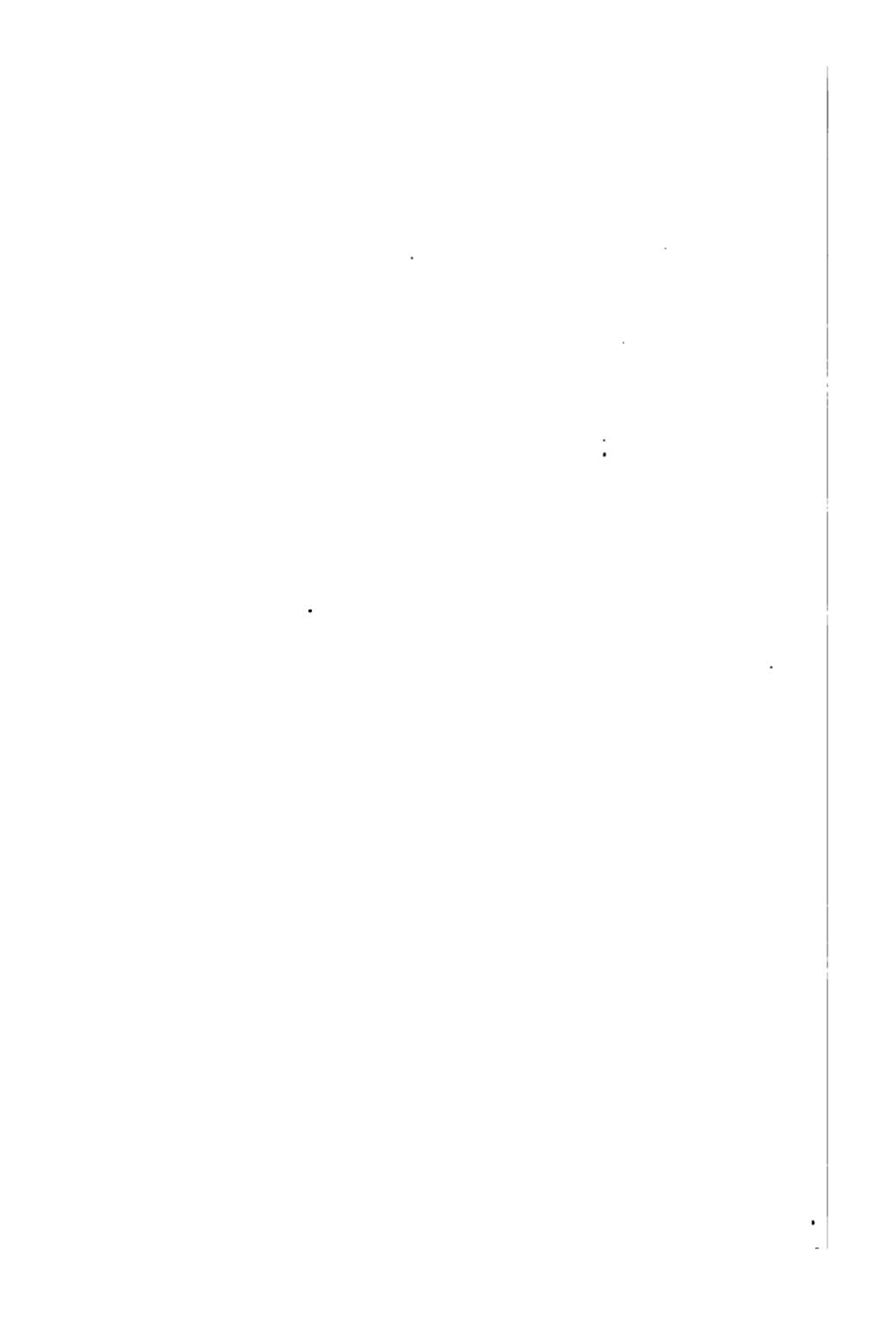
Attended by all that should accompany old age, life drew to its close. In the autumn of 1881 he had an attack of illness, which left him in a condition of nervous prostration and suffering. Neither pain nor sleeplessness could overcome his patience; the serenity of his soul was unclouded, but his desire for death was strong. In March, 1882, a chill caught in an afternoon walk on his veranda brought on a

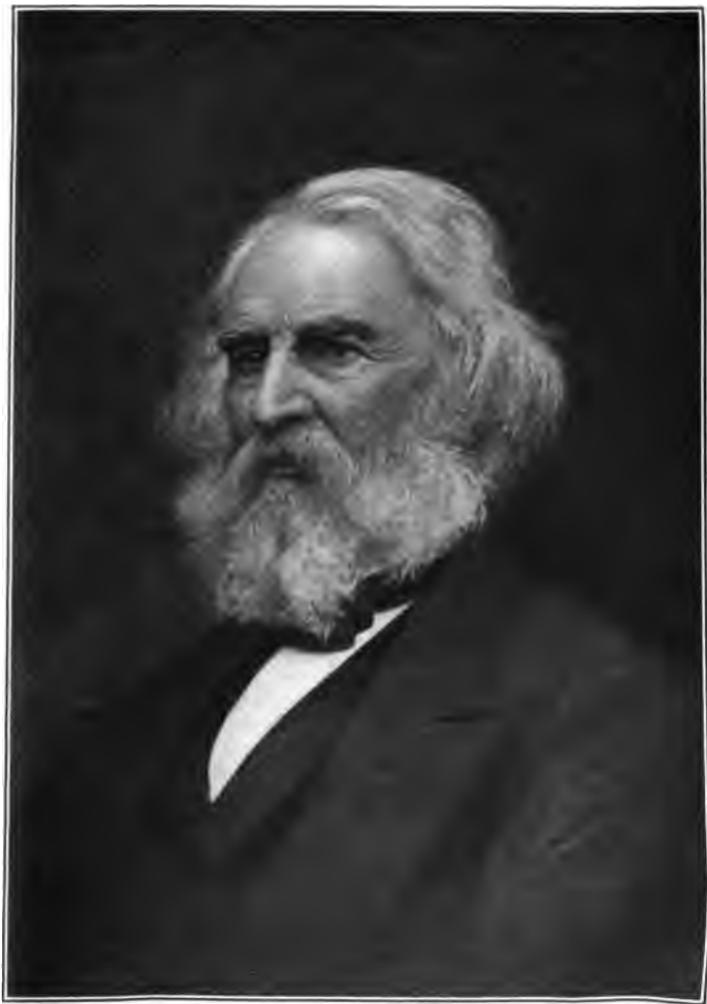
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sharp attack of illness,— his strength failed rapidly, and after five days, on Friday, the 24th of March, he died. Never had a poet been so widely loved, never was the death of a poet so widely mourned.

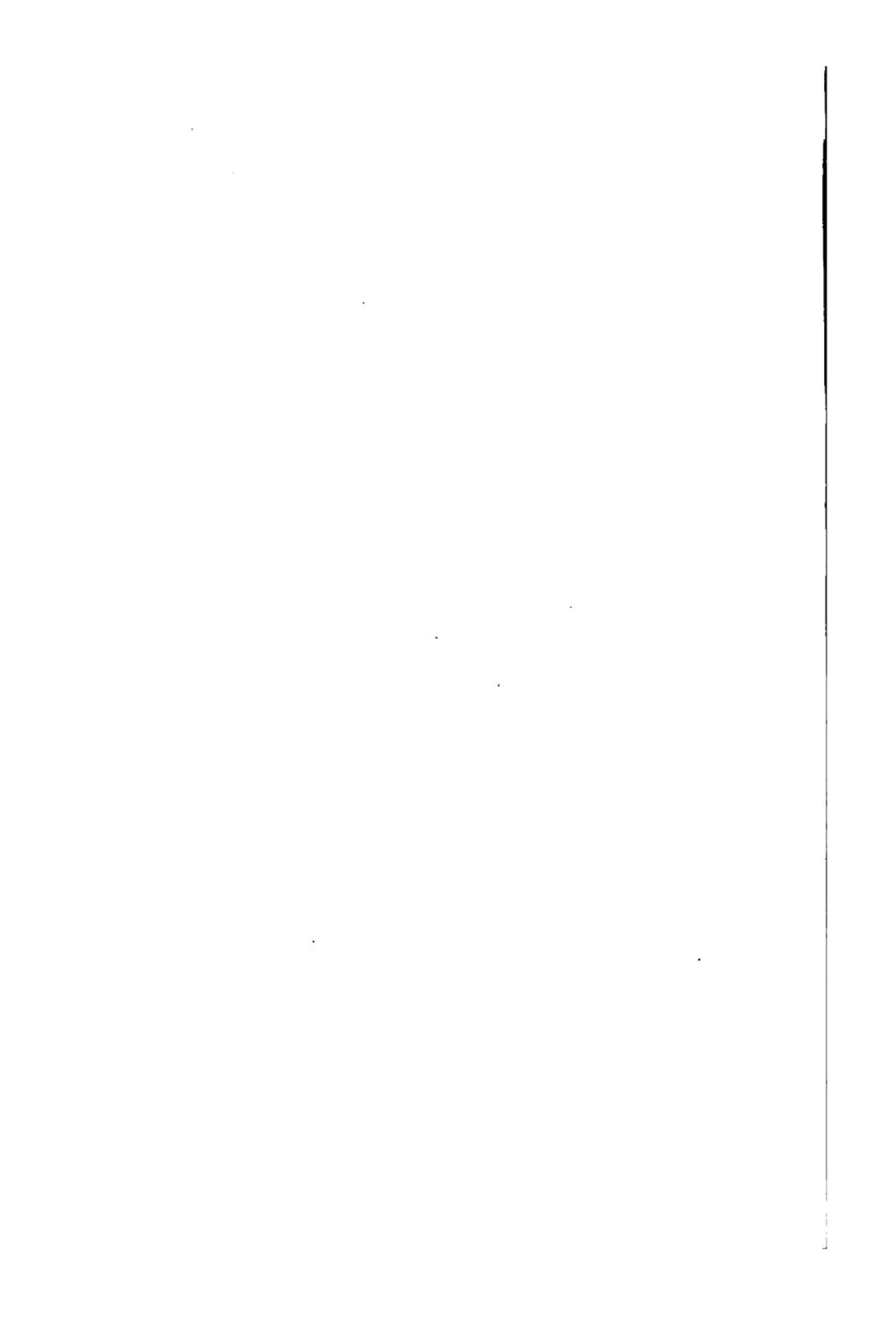
At the burial, Mr. Emerson, whose own death was to follow in less than five weeks, and whose powers of memory were already shattered, standing near the grave, said to his companion, “I cannot recall the name of our friend, but he was a good man.” Longfellow’s poetry is the image of his goodness. Its music, the harmony of its verse and thought, the simplicity of its expression, the sincerity of its sentiment, are all traits of character no less than of genius. Like most other poets he doubtless wrote much that will not last, and as his barque floats down the current of time there will be jettison of part of the cargo. But what remains will be dear to future generations as to ours, and the lovers of the poetry will then, as now, be lovers of the poet.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEMS





Henry W. Longfellow



THE BATTLE OF LOVELL'S POND¹

COLD, cold is the north wind and rude is the blast
That sweeps like a hurricane loudly and fast,
As it moans through the tall waving pines lone and
drear,
Sighs a requiem sad o'er the warrior's bier.

The war-whoop is still, and the savage's yell
Has sunk into silence along the wild dell;
The din of the battle, the tumult, is o'er,
And the war-clarion's voice is now heard no more.

¹ These verses were written by Longfellow in his fourteenth year, and have interest as the first of his writing to appear in print. They were published in the *Portland Gazette* November 17, 1820.

The battle to which they refer was famous in the annals of Maine and New Hampshire, and the story of it was fitted to touch a boy's fancy. It was one in the long series of unhappy fights between the settlers in the wild border region of Maine and the Indians whom they dispossessed and maltreated. In the spring of 1724 a volunteer company of forty-six men, under the command of Captain John Lovewell, who in the preceding winter had conducted two successful expeditions against the Indians, set out to attack the Indian villages on the upper part of the Saco River. On the third of May, near a large pond, they met a considerable body of Indians and engaged in a battle in which Lovewell and more than thirty of his men were killed. It was the last serious fight with the Indians in this part of the country.

In 1825 the hundredth anniversary of the battle was commemorated at Fryeburg, Maine, and the still youthful poet wrote an Ode for the occasion.

PRELUDE TO

The warriors that fought for their country, and bled,
Have sunk to their rest; the damp earth is their bed;
No stone tells the place where their ashes repose,
Nor points out the spot from the graves of their foes.

They died in their glory, surrounded by fame,
And Victory's loud trump their death did proclaim;
They are dead; but they live in each Patriot's breast,
And their names are engraven on honor's bright crest.

PRELUDE TO VOICES OF THE NIGHT

PLEASANT it was, when woods were green
And winds were soft and low,
To lie amid some sylvan scene,
Where, the long drooping boughs between,
Shadows dark and sunlight sheen
Alternate come and go;

Or where the denser grove receives
No sunlight from above,
But the dark foliage interweaves
In one unbroken roof of leaves,
Underneath whose sloping eaves
The shadows hardly move.

Beneath some patriarchal tree
I lay upon the ground;
His hoary arms uplifted he,
And all the broad leaves over me

VOICES OF THE NIGHT

Clapped their little hands in glee,
With one continuous sound;—

A slumberous sound, a sound that brings
The feelings of a dream,
As of innumerable wings,
As, when a bell no longer swings,
Faint the hollow murmur rings
O'er meadow, lake, and stream.

And dreams of that which cannot die,
Bright visions, came to me,
As lapsed in thought I used to lie,
And gaze into the summer sky,
Where the sailing clouds went by,
Like ships upon the sea;

Dreams that the soul of youth engage
Ere Fancy has been quelled;
Old legends of the monkish page,
Traditions of the saint and sage,
Tales that have the rime of age,
And chronicles of eld.

And, loving still these quaint old themes,
Even in the city's throng
I feel the freshness of the streams,
That, crossed by shades and sunny gleams,
Water the green land of dreams,
The holy land of song.

PRELUD E TO

Therefore, at Pentecost, which brings
The Spring, clothed like a bride,
When nestling buds unfold their wings,
And bishop's-caps have golden rings,
Musing upon many things,
I sought the woodlands wide.

The green trees whispered low and mild;
It was a sound of joy!
They were my playmates when a child,
And rocked me in their arms so wild!
Still they looked at me and smiled,
As if I were a boy;

And ever whispered, mild and low,
“Come, be a child once more!”
And waved their long arms to and fro,
And beckoned solemnly and slow;
Oh, I could not choose but go
Into the woodlands hoar, —

Into the blithe and breathing air,
Into the solemn wood,
Solemn and silent everywhere!
Nature with folded hands seemed there,
Kneeling at her evening prayer!
Like one in prayer I stood.

Before me rose an avenue
Of tall and sombrous pines;

VOICES OF THE NIGHT

Abroad their fan-like branches grew,
And, where the sunshine darted through,
Spread a vapor soft and blue,
In long and sloping lines.

And, falling on my weary brain,
Like a fast-falling shower,
The dreams of youth came back again;—
Low lisplings of the summer rain,
Dropping on the ripened grain,
As once upon the flower.

Visions of childhood! Stay, oh, stay!
Ye were so sweet and wild!
And distant voices seemed to say,
“It cannot be! They pass away!
Other themes demand thy lay;
Thou art no more a child!

“The land of Song within thee lies,
Watered by living springs;
The lids of Fancy’s sleepless eyes
Are gates unto that Paradise;
Holy thoughts, like stars, arise;
Its clouds are angels’ wings.

“Learn, that henceforth thy song shall be,
Not mountains capped with snow,
Nor forests sounding like the sea,
Nor rivers flowing ceaselessly,

VOICES OF THE NIGHT

Where the woodlands bend to see
The bending heavens below.

“There is a forest where the din
Of iron branches sounds;
A mighty river roars between,
And whosoever looks therein
Sees the heavens all black with sin,
Sees not its depths nor bounds.

“Athwart the swinging branches cast,
Soft rays of sunshine pour;
Then comes the fearful wintry blast;
Our hopes, like withered leaves, fall fast;
Pallid lips say, ‘It is past!
We can return no more!’

“Look, then, into thy heart, and write!
Yes, into life’s deep stream!
All forms of sorrow and delight,
All solemn Voices of the Night,
That can soothe thee, or affright, —
Be these henceforth thy theme.”

A PSALM OF LIFE

A PSALM OF LIFE

WHAT THE HEART OF THE YOUNG MAN SAID TO THE PSALMIST

TELL me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!—
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

WRECK OF THE HESPERUS

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!

Let the dead Past bury its dead!

Act, — act in the living Present!

Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us

We can make our lives sublime,

And, departing, leave behind us

Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,

Sailing o'er life's solemn main,

A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,

Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,

With a heart for any fate;

Still achieving, still pursuing,

Learn to labor and to wait.

THE WRECK OF THE HESPERUS

It was the schooner Hesperus,

That sailed the wintry sea;

And the skipper had taken his little daughtér,

To bear him company.

Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax,

Her cheeks like the dawn of day,

WRECK OF THE HESPERUS

And her bosom white as the hawthorn buds,
That ope in the month of May.

The skipper he stood beside the helm,
His pipe was in his mouth,
And he watched how the veering flaw did blow
The smoke now West, now South.

Then up and spake an old Sailór,
Had sailed to the Spanish Main,
“I pray thee, put into yonder port,
For I fear a hurricane.

“Last night, the moon had a golden ring,
And to-night no moon we see!”
The skipper, he blew a whiff from his pipe,
And a scornful laugh laughed he.

Colder and louder blew the wind,
A gale from the Northeast,
The snow fell hissing in the brine,
And the billows frothed like yeast.

Down came the storm, and smote amain
The vessel in its strength;
She shuddered and paused, like a frighted steed,
Then leaped her cable’s length.

“Come hither! come hither! my little daughtér,
And do not tremble so;

WRECK OF THE HESPERUS

For I can weather the roughest gale
That ever wind did blow."

He wrapped her warm in his seaman's coat
Against the stinging blast;
He cut a rope from a broken spar,
And bound her to the mast.

"O father! I hear the church-bells ring,
Oh say, what may it be?"
"T is a fog-bell on a rock-bound coast!" —
And he steered for the open sea.

"O father! I hear the sound of guns,
Oh say, what may it be?"
"Some ship in distress, that cannot live
In such an angry sea!"

"O father! I see a gleaming light,
Oh say, what may it be?"
But the father answered never a word,
A frozen corpse was he.

Lashed to the helm, all stiff and stark,
With his face turned to the skies,
The lantern gleamed through the gleaming snow
On his fixed and glassy eyes.

Then the maiden clasped her hands and prayed
That saved she might be;

WRECK OF THE HESPERUS

And she thought of Christ who stilled the wave,
On the Lake of Galilee.

And fast through the midnight dark and drear,
Through the whistling sleet and snow,
Like a sheeted ghost, the vessel swept
Tow'rds the reef of Norman's Woe.

And ever the fitful gusts between
A sound came from the land;
It was the sound of the trampling surf
On the rocks and the hard sea-sand.

The breakers were right beneath her bows,
She drifted a dreary wreck,
And a whooping billow swept the crew
Like icicles from her deck.

She struck where the white and fleecy waves
Looked soft as carded wool,
But the cruel rocks, they gored her side
Like the horns of an angry bull.

Her rattling shrouds, all sheathed in ice,
With the masts went by the board;
Like a vessel of glass, she stove and sank,
Ho! ho! the breakers roared!

At daybreak, on the bleak sea-beach,
A fisherman stood aghast,

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH

To see the form of a maiden fair,
Lashed close to a drifting mast.

The salt sea was frozen on her breast,
The salt tears in her eyes;
And he saw her hair, like the brown seaweed,
On the billows fall and rise.

Such was the wreck of the Hesperus,
In the midnight and the snow!
Christ save us all from a death like this,
On the reef of Norman's Woe!

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH ¹

UNDER a spreading chestnut-tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.

His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
His face is like the tan;

¹ The suggestion of this poem came from the smithy which the poet passed daily, and which stood beneath a horse-chestnut tree not far from his house in Cambridge. The tree, against the protests of Mr. Longfellow and others, was removed in 1876, on the ground that it took up too much of the road.

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH

His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,
You can hear his bellows blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
With measured beat and slow,
Like a sexton ringing the village bell,
When the evening sun is low.

And children coming home from school
Look in at the open door;
They love to see the flaming forge,
And hear the bellows roar,
And watch the burning sparks that fly
Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

He goes on Sunday to the church,
And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach,
He hears his daughter's voice,
Singing in the village choir,
And it makes his heart rejoice.

It sounds to him like her mother's voice,
Singing in Paradise!
He needs must think of her once more,
How in the grave she lies;

TO THE RIVER CHARLES

And with his hard, rough hand he wipes
A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling, — rejoicing, — sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begin,
Each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,
For the lesson thou hast taught!
Thus at the flaming forge of life
Our fortunes must be wrought;
Thus on its sounding anvil shaped
Each burning deed and thought.

TO THE RIVER CHARLES

RIVER! that in silence windest
Through the meadows, bright and free,
Till at length thy rest thou findest
In the bosom of the sea!

Four long years of mingled feeling,
Half in rest, and half in strife,
I have seen thy waters stealing
Onward, like the stream of life.¹

¹ The river Charles flows in view of Craigie House, which Mr. Longfellow began to occupy in the summer of 1837.

TO THE RIVER CHARLES

Thou hast taught me, Silent River!

Many a lesson, deep and long;

Thou hast been a generous giver;

I can give thee but a song.

Oft in sadness and in illness,

I have watched thy current glide,

Till the beauty of its stillness

Overflowed me, like a tide.

And in better hours and brighter,

When I saw thy waters gleam,

I have felt my heart beat lighter,

And leap onward with thy stream.

Not for this alone I love thee,

Nor because thy waves of blue

From celestial seas above thee

Take their own celestial hue.

Where yon shadowy woodlands hide thee,

And thy waters disappear,

Friends I love have dwelt beside thee,

And have made thy margin dear.

More than this; — thy name reminds me

Of three friends,¹ all true and tried;

And that name, like magic, binds me

Closer, closer to thy side.

¹ These three friends were Charles Sumner, Charles Folsom, and Charles Amory.

THE BRIDGE

Friends my soul with joy remembers!
How like quivering flames they start,
When I fan the living embers
On the hearthstone of my heart!

'T is for this, thou Silent River!
That my spirit leans to thee;
Thou hast been a generous giver,
Take this idle song from me.

THE BRIDGE.¹

I STOOD on the bridge at midnight,
As the clocks were striking the hour,
And the moon rose o'er the city,
Behind the dark church-tower.

I saw her bright reflection
In the waters under me,
Like a golden goblet falling
And sinking into the sea.

And far in the hazy distance
Of that lovely night in June,

¹ The poem when first published in 1845 was entitled *The Bridge over the Charles*, the river which separates Cambridge from Boston. The old wooden bridge has now, 1906, given place to one of stone. The "flaming furnace" referred to in the third stanza was that of an iron foundry on the so-called Milldam between Boston and Brookline.

THE BRIDGE

The blaze of the flaming furnace
Gleamed redder than the moon.

Among the long, black rafters
The wavering shadows lay,
And the current that came from the ocean
Seemed to lift and bear them away;

As, sweeping and eddying through them,
Rose the belated tide,
And, streaming into the moonlight,
The seaweed floated wide.

And like those waters rushing
Among the wooden piers,
A flood of thoughts came o'er me
That filled my eyes with tears.

How often, oh how often,
In the days that had gone by,
I had stood on that bridge at midnight
And gazed on that wave and sky!

How often, oh how often,
I had wished that the ebbing tide
Would bear me away on its bosom
O'er the ocean wild and wide!

For my heart was hot and restless,
And my life was full of care,

THE BRIDGE

And the burden laid upon me
Seemed greater than I could bear.

But now it has fallen from me,
It is buried in the sea;
And only the sorrow of others
Throws its shadow over me.

Yet whenever I cross the river
On its bridge with wooden piers,
Like the odor of brine from the ocean
Comes the thought of other years.

And I think how many thousands
Of care-encumbered men,
Each bearing his burden of sorrow,
Have crossed the bridge since then.

I see the long procession
Still passing to and fro,
The young heart hot and restless,
And the old subdued and slow!

And forever and forever,
As long as the river flows,
As long as the heart has passions,
As long as life has woes;

The moon and its broken reflection
And its shadows shall appear,
As the symbol of love in heaven,
And its wavering image here.

THE ROPEWALK

THE ROPEWALK.¹

IN that building, long and low,
With its windows all a-row,
 Like the port-holes of a hulk,
Human spiders spin and spin,
Backward down their threads so thin
 Dropping, each a hempen bulk.

At the end, an open door;
Squares of sunshine on the floor
 Light the long and dusky lane;
And the whirring of a wheel,
Dull and drowsy, makes me feel
 All its spokes are in my brain.

As the spinners to the end
Downward go and reascend,
 Gleam the long threads in the sun;
While within this brain of mine
Cobwebs brighter and more fine
 By the busy wheel are spun.

Two fair maidens in a swing,
Like white doves upon the wing,
 First before my vision pass;
Laughing; as their gentle hands

¹ The Ropewalk stood on the further end of the open tract, of which the greater part is now, 1906, known as the Soldiers' Field.

THE ROPEWALK

Closely clasp the twisted strands,
At their shadow on the grass.

Then a booth of mountebanks,
With its smell of tan and planks,
And a girl poised high in air
On a cord, in spangled dress,
With a faded loveliness,
And a weary look of care.

Then a homestead among farms,
And a woman with bare arms
Drawing water from a well;
As the bucket mounts apace,
With it mounts her own fair face,
As at some magician's spell.

Then an old man in a tower,
Ringing loud the noontide hour,
While the rope coils round and round
Like a serpent at his feet,
And again, in swift retreat,
Nearly lifts him from the ground.

Then within a prison-yard,
Faces fixed, and stern, and hard,
Laughter and indecent mirth;
Ah! it is the gallows-tree!
Breath of Christian charity,
Blow, and sweep it from the earth!

A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE

Then a school-boy, with his kite
Gleaming in a sky of light,
And an eager, upward look;
Steeds pursued through lane and field;
Fowlers with their snares concealed;
And an angler by a brook.

Ships rejoicing in the breeze,
Wrecks that float o'er unknown seas,
Anchors dragged through faithless sand ;
Sea-fog drifting overhead,
And, with lessening line and lead,
Sailors feeling for the land.

All these scenes do I behold,
These, and many left untold,
In that building long and low;
While the wheel goes round and round,
With a drowsy, dreamy sound,
And the spinners backward go.

A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE

THIS is the place. Stand still, my steed,
Let me review the scene,
And summon from the shadowy Past
The forms that once have been.

The Past and Present here unite
Beneath Time's flowing tide,

A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE

Like footprints hidden by a brook,
But seen on either side.

Here runs the highway to the town;
There the green lane descends,
Through which I walked to church with thee,
O gentlest of my friends!¹

The shadow of the linden-trees
Lay moving on the grass;
Between them and the moving boughs,
A shadow, thou didst pass.

Thy dress was like the lilies,
And thy heart as pure as they:
One of God's holy messengers
Did walk with me that day.

I saw the branches of the trees
Bend down thy touch to meet,
The clover-blossoms in the grass
Rise up to kiss thy feet.

“Sleep, sleep to-day, tormenting cares,
Of earth and folly born!”
Solemnly sang the village choir
On that sweet Sabbath morn.

¹ The scene of this poem is mentioned in the poet's diary under date of August 31, 1846. “In the afternoon a delicious drive with F. and C. through Brookline, by the church and ‘the green lane,’ and homeward through a lovelier lane, with barberries and wild vines clustering over the old stone walls.”

A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE

Through the closed blinds the golden sun
Poured in a dusty beam,
Like the celestial ladder seen
By Jacob in his dream.

And ever and anon, the wind
Sweet-scented with the hay,
Turned o'er the hymn-book's fluttering leaves
That on the window lay.

Long was the good man's sermon,
Yet it seemed not so to me;
For he spake of Ruth the beautiful,
And still I thought of thee.

Long was the prayer he uttered,
Yet it seemed not so to me;
For in my heart I prayed with him,
And still I thought of thee.

But now, alas! the place seems changed;
Thou art no longer here:
Part of the sunshine of the scene
With thee did disappear.

Though thoughts, deep-rooted in my heart,
Like pine-trees dark and high,
Subdue the light of noon, and breathe
A low and ceaseless sigh;

TO A CHILD

This memory brightens o'er the past,
As when the sun, concealed
Behind some cloud that near us hangs,
Shines on a distant field.

TO A CHILD

DEAR Child! how radiant on thy mother's knee,
With merry-making eyes and jocund smiles,
Thou gazest at the painted tiles,
Whose figures grace,
With many a grotesque form and face,
The ancient chimney of thy nursery!
The lady with the gay macaw,
The dancing girl, the brave bashaw
With bearded lip and chin;
And, leaning idly o'er his gate,
Beneath the imperial fan of state,
The Chinese mandarin.

With what a look of proud command
Thou shakest in thy little hand
The coral rattle with its silver bells,
Making a merry tune!
Thousands of years in Indian seas
That coral grew, by slow degrees,
Until some deadly and wild monsoon
Dashed it on Coromandel's sand!
Those silver bells

TO A CHILD

Reposed of yore,
As shapeless ore,
Far down in the deep-sunken wells
Of darksome mines,
In some obscure and sunless place,
Beneath huge Chimborazo's base,
Or Potosi's o'erhanging pines!
And thus for thee, O little child,
Through many a danger and escape,
The tall ships passed the stormy cape;
For thee in foreign lands remote,
Beneath a burning, tropic clime,
The Indian peasant, chasing the wild goat,
Himself as swift and wild,
In falling, clutched the frail arbute,
The fibres of whose shallow root,
Uplifted from the soil, betrayed
The silver veins beneath it laid,
The buried treasures of the miser, Time.

But, lo! thy door is left ajar;
Thou hearest footsteps from afar;
And, at the sound,
Thou turnest round
With quick and questioning eyes,
Like one who, in a foreign land,
Beholds on every hand
Some source of wonder and surprise!
And, restlessly, impatiently,
Thou strivest, strugglest, to be free.

TO A CHILD

The four walls of thy nursery
Are now like prison walls to thee.
No more thy mother's smiles,
No more the painted tiles,
Delight thee, nor the playthings on the floor,
That won thy little, beating heart before;
Thou strugglest for the open door.

Through these once solitary halls
Thy pattering footstep falls.
The sound of thy merry voice
Makes the old walls
Jubilant, and they rejoice
With the joy of thy young heart,
O'er the light of whose gladness
No shadows of sadness
From the sombre background of memory start.

Once, ah! once, within these walls,
One whom memory oft recalls,
The Father of his Country, dwelt.
And yonder meadows broad and damp
The fires of the besieging camp
Encircled with a burning belt.
Up and down these echoing stairs,
Heavy with the weight of cares,
Sounded his majestic tread;
Yes! within this very room
Sat he in those hours of gloom,
Weary both in heart and head.

TO A CHILD

But what are these grave thoughts to thee?
Out, out! into the open air!
Thy only dream is liberty,
Thou carest little how or where.
I see thee eager at thy play,
Now shouting to the apples on the tree,
With cheeks as round and red as they;
And now among the yellow stalks,
Among the flowering shrubs and plants,
As restless as the bee.
Along the garden walks,
The tracks of thy small carriage-wheels I trace;
And see at every turn how they efface
Whole villages of sand-roofed tents,
That rise like golden domes
Above the cavernous and secret homes
Of wandering and nomadic tribes of ants.
Ah, cruel little Tamerlane,
Who, with thy dreadful reign,
Dost persecute and overwhelm
These hapless Troglodytes of thy realm!

What! tired already! with those suppliant looks,
And voice more beautiful than a poet's books
Or murmuring sound of water as it flows,
Thou comest back to parley with repose!
This rustic seat in the old apple-tree,
With its o'erhanging golden canopy
• Of leaves illuminate with autumnal hues,
And shining with the argent light of dews,

TO A CHILD

Shall for a season be our place of rest.
Beneath us, like an oriole's pendent nest,
From which the laughing birds have taken wing,
By thee abandoned, hangs thy vacant swing.
Dream-like the waters of the river gleam;
A sailless vessel drops adown the stream,
And like it, to a sea as wide and deep,
Thou driftest gently down the tides of sleep.

O child! O new-born denizen
Of life's great city! on thy head
The glory of the morn is shed,
Like a celestial benison!
Here at the portal thou dost stand,
And with thy little hand
Thou openest the mysterious gate
Into the future's undiscovered land.
I see its valves expand,
As at the touch of Fate!
Into those realms of love and hate,
Into that darkness blank and drear,
By some prophetic feeling taught,
I launch the bold, adventurous thought,
Freighted with hope and fear;
As upon subterranean streams,
In caverns unexplored and dark,
Men sometimes launch a fragile bark,
Laden with flickering fire,
And watch its swift receding beams,

TO A CHILD

Until at length they disappear,
And in the distant dark expire.

By what astrology of fear or hope
Dare I to cast thy horoscope!
Like the new moon thy life appears;
A little strip of silver light,
And widening outward into night
The shadowy disk of future years;
And yet upon its outer rim,
A luminous circle, faint and dim,
And scarcely visible to us here,
Rounds and completes the perfect sphere;
A prophecy and intimation,
A pale and feeble adumbration,
Of the great world of light, that lies
Behind all human destinies.

Ah! if thy fate, with anguish fraught,
Should be to wet the dusty soil
With the hot tears and sweat of toil, —
To struggle with imperious thought,
Until the overburdened brain,
Weary with labor, faint with pain,
Like a jarred pendulum, retain
Only its motion, not its power, —
Remember, in that perilous hour,
When most afflicted and oppressed,
From labor there shall come forth rest.

TO A CHILD

And if a more auspicious fate
On thy advancing steps await,
Still let it ever be thy pride
To linger by the laborer's side;
With words of sympathy or song
To cheer the dreary march along
Of the great army of the poor,
O'er desert sand, o'er dangerous moor.
Nor to thyself the task shall be
Without reward; for thou shalt learn
The wisdom early to discern
True beauty in utility;
As great Pythagoras of yore,
Standing beside the blacksmith's door,
And hearing the hammers, as they smote
The anvils with a different note,
Stole from the varying tones, that hung
Vibrant on every iron tongue,
The secret of the sounding wire,
And formed the seven-chorded lyre.

Enough! I will not play the Seer;
I will no longer strive to ope
The mystic volume, where appear
The herald Hope, forerunning Fear,
And Fear, the pursuivant of Hope.
Thy destiny remains untold;
For, like Acetes' shaft of old,
The swift thought kindles as it flies,
And burns to ashes in the skies.

THE OPEN WINDOW

THE OPEN WINDOW

THE old house by the lindens¹
 Stood silent in the shade,
And on the gravelled pathway
 The light and shadow played.

I saw the nursery windows
 Wide open to the air;
But the faces of the children,
 They were no longer there.

The large Newfoundland house-dog
 Was standing by the door;
He looked for his little playmates,
 Who would return no more.

They walked not under the lindens,
 They played not in the hall;
But shadow, and silence, and sadness
 Were hanging over all.

The birds sang in the branches,
 With sweet, familiar tone;

¹ The old house by the lindens is what was known as the Lechmere house which stood on Brattle Street, at the corner of Sparks Street, in Cambridge. It was in this house that Baron Riedesel was quartered as prisoner of war after the surrender of Burgoyne, and the window-pane used to be shown on which the Baroness wrote her name with a diamond.

CHURCHYARD AT CAMBRIDGE

But the voices of the children
Will be heard in dreams alone!

And the boy that walked beside me,
He could not understand
Why closer in mine, ah! closer,
I pressed his warm, soft hand!

IN THE CHURCHYARD AT CAMBRIDGE

IN the village churchyard she lies,
Dust is in her beautiful eyes,
No more she breathes, nor feels, nor stirs;
At her feet and at her head
Lies a slave to attend the dead,
But their dust is white as hers.

Was she, a lady of high degree,
So much in love with the vanity
And foolish pomp of this world of ours?
Or was it Christian charity,
And lowliness and humility,
The richest and rarest of all dowers?

Who shall tell us? No one speaks;
No color shoots into those cheeks,
Either of anger or of pride,
At the rude question we have asked;
Nor will the mystery be unmasked
By those who are sleeping at her side.

THE BURIAL OF THE POET

Hereafter? — And do you think to look
On the terrible pages of that Book
 To find her failings, faults, and errors?
Ah, you will then have other cares,
In your own shortcomings and despairs,
 In your own secret sins and terrors!

THE BURIAL OF THE POET¹

In the old churchyard of his native town,
And in the ancestral tomb beside the wall,
We laid him in the sleep that comes to all,
And left him to his rest and his renown.
The snow was falling, as if Heaven dropped down
 White flowers of Paradise to strew his pall; —
The dead around him seemed to wake, and call
 His name, as worthy of so white a crown.
And now the moon is shining on the scene,
 And the broad sheet of snow is written o'er
 With shadows cruciform of leafless trees,
As once the winding-sheet of Saladin
 With chapters of the Koran; but, ah! more
 Mysterious and triumphant signs are these.

¹ The Poet was Richard Henry Dana, author of "The Buccaneer" and other memorable poems. He died in 1879.

THE TWO ANGELS

THE TWO ANGELS¹

Two angels, one of Life and one of Death,
Passed o'er our village as the morning broke;
The dawn was on their faces, and beneath,
The sombre houses hearsed with plumes of smoke.

Their attitude and aspect were the same,
Alike their features and their robes of white;
But one was crowned with amaranth, as with flame,
And one with asphodels, like flakes of light.

I saw them pause on their celestial way;
Then said I, with deep fear and doubt oppressed,
“Beat not so loud, my heart, lest thou betray
The place where thy beloved are at rest!”

And he who wore the crown of asphodels,
Descending, at my door began to knock,
And my soul sank within me, as in wells
The waters sink before an earthquake’s shock.

I recognized the nameless agony,
The terror and the tremor and the pain,
That oft before had filled or haunted me,
And now returned with threefold strength again.

¹ This poem was written, as Mr. Longfellow told in a letter, “on the birth of my younger daughter, and the death of the young and beautiful wife of my neighbor and friend, the poet Lowell.” The date was the twenty-seventh of October, 1853.

THE TWO ANGELS

The door I opened to my heavenly guest,
And listened, for I thought I heard God's voice;
And, knowing whatsoe'er he sent was best,
Dared neither to lament nor to rejoice.

Then with a smile, that filled the house with light,
“My errand is not Death, but Life,” he said;
And ere I answered, passing out of sight,
On his celestial embassy he sped.

”T was at thy door, O friend! and not at mine,
The angel with the amaranthine wreath,
Pausing, descended, and with voice divine
Whispered a word that had a sound like Death.

Then fell upon the house a sudden gloom,
A shadow on those features fair and thin;
And softly, from that hushed and darkened room,
Two angels issued, where but one went in.

All is of God! If he but wave his hand,
The mists collect, the rain falls thick and loud,
Till, with a smile of light on sea and land,
Lo! he looks back from the departing cloud.

Angels of Life and Death alike are his;
Without his leave they pass no threshold o'er;
Who, then, would wish or dare, believing this,
Against his messengers to shut the door?

RESIGNATION

RESIGNATION¹

THERE is no flock, however watched and tended,
 But one dead lamb is there!
There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
 But has one vacant chair!

The air is full of farewells to the dying,
 And mournings for the dead;
The heart of Rachel, for her children crying,
 Will not be comforted!

Let us be patient! These severe afflictions
 Not from the ground arise,
But oftentimes celestial benedictions
 Assume this dark disguise.

We see but dimly through the mists and vapors;
 Amid these earthly damps
What seem to us but sad, funereal tapers
 May be heaven's distant lamps.

There is no Death! What seems so is transition;
 This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life elysian,
 Whose portal we call Death.

¹ Written in the autumn of 1848, after the death of his little daughter Fanny. There is a passage in the poet's diary, under date of November 12, in which he says: "I feel very sad to-day. I miss very much my dear little Fanny. An inappeasable longing to see her comes over me at times, which I can hardly control."

RESIGNATION

She is not dead, — the child of our affection, —
 But gone unto that school
Where she no longer needs our poor protection,
 And Christ himself doth rule.

In that great cloister's stillness and seclusion,
 By guardian angels led,
Safe from temptation, safe from sin's pollution,
 She lives, whom we call dead.

Day after day we think what she is doing
 In those bright realms of air;
Year after year, her tender steps pursuing,
 Behold her grown more fair.

Thus do we walk with her, and keep unbroken
 The bond which nature gives,
Thinking that our remembrance, though unspoken,
 May reach her where she lives.

Not as a child shall we again behold her;
 For when with raptures wild
In our embraces we again enfold her,
 She will not be a child;

But a fair maiden, in her Father's mansion,
 Clothed with celestial grace;
And beautiful with all the soul's expansion
 Shall we behold her face.

SEASIDE AND FIRESIDE

And though at times impetuous with emotion
 And anguish long suppressed,
The swelling heart heaves moaning like the ocean,
 That cannot be at rest, —

We will be patient, and assuage the feeling
 We may not wholly stay;
By silence sanctifying, not concealing,
 The grief that must have way.

DEDICATION TO THE VOLUME ENTITLED “THE SEASIDE AND THE FIRESIDE”

As one who, walking in the twilight gloom,
 Hears round about him voices as it darkens,
And seeing not the forms from which they come,
 Pauses from time to time, and turns and hearkens;

So walking here in twilight, O my friends!
 I hear your voices, softened by the distance,
And pause, and turn to listen, as each sends
 His words of friendship, comfort, and assistance.

If any thought of mine, or sung or told,
 Has ever given delight or consolation,
Ye have repaid me back a thousand-fold,
 By every friendly sign and salutation.

Thanks for the sympathies that ye have shown!
 Thanks for each kindly word, each silent token,

SEASIDE AND FIRESIDE

That teaches me, when seeming most alone,
Friends are around us, though no word be spoken.

Kind messages, that pass from land to land;
Kind letters, that betray the heart's deep history,
In which we feel the pressure of a hand,—
One touch of fire, — and all the rest is mystery!

The pleasant books, that silently among
Our household treasures take familiar places,
And are to us as if a living tongue
Spake from the printed leaves or pictured faces!

Perhaps on earth I never shall behold,
With eye of sense, your outward form and semblance;
Therefore to me ye never will grow old,
But live forever young in my remembrance!

Never grow old, nor change, nor pass away!
Your gentle voices will flow on forever,
When life grows bare and tarnished with decay,
As through a leafless landscape flows a river.

Not chance of birth or place has made us friends,
Being oftentimes of different tongues and nations,
But the endeavor for the selfsame ends,
With the same hopes, and fears, and aspirations.

Therefore I hope to join your seaside walk,
Saddened, and mostly silent, with emotion;

MY LOST YOUTH

Not interrupting with intrusive talk
The grand, majestic symphonies of ocean.

Therefore I hope, as no unwelcome guest,
At your warm fireside, when the lamps are lighted,
To have my place reserved among the rest,
Nor stand as one unsought and uninvited!

MY LOST YOUTH

OFTEN I think of the beautiful town
That is seated by the sea;¹
Often in thought go up and down
The pleasant streets of that dear old town,
And my youth comes back to me.
And a verse of a Lapland song
Is haunting my memory still:
“A boy’s will is the wind’s will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

¹ Under the date of March 29, 1855, Longfellow notes in his Diary: “At night, as I lie in bed, a poem comes into my mind — a memory of Portland, my native town, the city by the sea.” And the next day he makes the following entry: “Wrote the poem, and am rather pleased with the bringing in of the two lines of the old Lapland song

“A boy’s will is the wind’s will
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

The lines are to be found in a Latin treatise entitled *Lapponea*, published in 1674, being a description of Lapland and its people, by Johannes Scheffer, Professor at Upsala. Chapter xxv relates to the marriage customs of the Lapps, and a nuptial song is given in the original Lappish in which the words occur that are translated as follows: “Puerorum voluntas, voluntas venti, juvenum cogitationes, longae cogitationes.”

MY LOST YOUTH

I can see the shadowy lines of its trees,
And catch, in sudden gleams,
The sheen of the far-surrounding seas,
And islands that were the Hesperides
Of all my boyish dreams.
And the burden of that old song,
It murmurs and whispers still:
“A boy’s will is the wind’s will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

I remember the black wharves and the slips,
And the sea-tides tossing free;
And Spanish sailors with bearded lips,
And the beauty and mystery of the ships,
And the magic of the sea.

And the voice of that wayward song
Is singing and saying still:
“A boy’s will is the wind’s will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

I remember the bulwarks by the shore,
And the fort upon the hill;
The sunrise gun, with its hollow roar,
The drum-beat repeated o’er and o’er,
And the bugle wild and shrill.

And the music of that old song
Throbs in my memory still:
“A boy’s will is the wind’s will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

MY LOST YOUTH

I remember the sea-fight¹ far away,
How it thundered o'er the tide!
And the dead captains, as they lay
In their graves, o'erlooking the tranquil bay
Where they in battle died.
And the sound of that mournful song
Goes through me with a thrill:
“A boy’s will is the wind’s will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

I can see the breezy dome of groves,
The shadows of Deering’s Woods;
And the friendships old and the early loves
Come back with a Sabbath sound, as of doves
In quiet neighborhoods.
And the verse of that sweet old song,
It flutters and murmurs still:
“A boy’s will is the wind’s will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

I remember the gleams and glooms that dart
Across the school-boy’s brain;
The song and the silence in the heart,
That in part are prophecies, and in part
Are longings wild and vain.
And the voice of that fitful song

¹ In 1813, when Longfellow was a boy of six, there was an engagement off the harbor of Portland between the American brig Enterprise and the English brig Boxer. Both captains were slain, but the Enterprise won the day, and after a fight of three quarters of an hour came into the harbor, bringing the Boxer with her.

MY LOST YOUTH

Sings on, and is never still.
“A boy’s will is the wind’s will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

There are things of which I may not speak;
There are dreams that cannot die;
There are thoughts that make the strong heart weak,
And bring a pallor into the cheek,
And a mist before the eye.
And the words of that fatal song
Come over me like a chill:
“A boy’s will is the wind’s will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

Strange to me now are the forms I meet,
When I visit the dear old town;
But the native air is pure and sweet,
And the trees that o’ershadow each well-known street,
As they balance up and down,
Are singing the beautiful song,
Are sighing and whispering still:
“A boy’s will is the wind’s will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

And Deering’s Woods are fresh and fair,
And with joy that is almost pain
My heart goes back to wander there,
And among the dreams of the days that were,
I find my lost youth again.
And the strange and beautiful song,

BIRTHDAY OF AGASSIZ

The groves are repeating it still:
“A boy’s will is the wind’s will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

THE FIFTIETH BIRTHDAY OF AGASSIZ¹

MAY 28, 1857.

It was fifty years ago
In the pleasant month of May,
In the beautiful Pays de Vaud,
A child in its cradle lay.

And Nature, the old nurse, took
The child upon her knee,
Saying: “Here is a story-book
Thy Father has written for thee.”

“Come, wander with me,” she said,
“Into regions yet untrod;
And read what is still unread
In the manuscripts of God.”

And he wandered away and away
With Nature, the dear old nurse,
Who sang to him night and day
The rhymes of the universe.

¹ Louis John Rudolph Agassiz, the great naturalist and teacher, was born in Switzerland, May 28, 1807, and died at Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 14, 1873.

HAWTHORNE

And whenever the way seemed long,
Or his heart began to fail,
She would sing a more wonderful song,
Or tell a more marvellous tale.

So she keeps him still a child,
And will not let him go,
Though at times his heart beats wild
For the beautiful Pays de Vaud;

Though at times he hears in his dreams
The Ranz des Vaches of old,
And the rush of mountain streams
From glaciers clear and cold;

And the mother at home says, "Hark!
For his voice I listen and yearn;
It is growing late and dark,
And my boy does not return!"

HAWTHORNE

MAY 23, 1864.¹
How beautiful it was, that one bright day
In the long week of rain!

¹ The date is that of the burial of Hawthorne. The poem was written just a month later. Mr. Longfellow wrote to Mr. Fields : "I have only tried to describe the state of mind I was in on that day. Did you not feel so likewise?" In sending a copy of the lines at the same time to Mrs. Hawthorne, he wrote: "I feel how imperfect and inadequate they are; but I trust you will pardon their deficiencies for the love I bear his memory."

HAWTHORNE

Though all its splendor could not chase away
The omnipresent pain.

The lovely town was white with apple-blooms,
And the great elms o'erhead
Dark shadows wove on their aerial looms
Shot through with golden thread.

Across the meadows, by the gray old manse,
The historic river flowed:
I was as one who wanders in a trance,
Unconscious of his road.

The faces of familiar friends seemed strange;
Their voices I could hear,
And yet the words they uttered seemed to change
Their meaning to my ear.

For the one face I looked for was not there,
The one low voice was mute;
Only an unseen presence filled the air,
And baffled my pursuit.

Now I look back, and meadow, manse, and stream
Dimly my thought defines;
I only see — a dream within a dream —
The hill-top hearsed with pines.

I only hear above his place of rest
Their tender undertone,

THREE FRIENDS OF MINE

The infinite longings of a troubled breast,
The voice so like his own.

There in seclusion and remote from men
The wizard hand lies cold,
Which at its topmost speed let fall the pen,
And left the tale half told.

Ah! who shall lift that wand of magic power,
And the lost clew regain?
The unfinished window in Aladdin's tower
Unfinished must remain!

THREE FRIENDS OF MINE¹

I

WHEN I remember them, those friends of mine,
Who are no longer here, the noble three,
Who half my life were more than friends to me,
And whose discourse was like a generous wine,
I most of all remember the divine
Something, that shone in them, and made us see
The archetypal man, and what might be
The amplitude of Nature's first design.
In vain I stretch my hands to clasp their hands;

¹ These sonnets record the poet's friendship with Cornelius Conway Felton, once Professor of Greek, afterward President of Harvard College, Louis Agassiz and Charles Sumner. The second and third sonnets were written at Nahant, where both Longfellow and Agassiz had cottages.

THREE FRIENDS OF MINE

I cannot find them. Nothing now is left
But a majestic memory. They meanwhile
Wander together in Elysian lands,
Perchance remembering me, who am bereft
Of their dear presence, and, remembering, smile.

II

In Attica thy birthplace should have been,
Or the Ionian Isles, or where the seas
Encircle in their arms the Cyclades,
So wholly Greek wast thou in thy serene
And childlike joy of life, O Philhellene!
Around thee would have swarmed the Attic bees;
Homer had been thy friend, or Socrates,
And Plato welcomed thee to his demesne.
For thee old legends breathed historic breath;
Thou sawest Poseidon in the purple sea,
And in the sunset Jason's fleece of gold!
Oh, what hadst thou to do with cruel Death,
Who wast so full of life, or Death with thee,
That thou shouldst die before thou hadst grown old!

III

I stand again on the familiar shore,
And hear the waves of the distracted sea
Piteously calling and lamenting thee,
And waiting restless at thy cottage door.
The rocks, the seaweed on the ocean floor,
The willows in the meadow, and the free
Wild winds of the Atlantic welcome me;

THREE FRIENDS OF MINE

Then why shouldst thou be dead, and come no more?
Ah, why shouldst thou be dead, when common men
Are busy with their trivial affairs,
Having and holding? Why, when thou hadst read
Nature's mysterious manuscript, and then
Wast ready to reveal the truth it bears,
Why art thou silent? Why shouldst thou be dead?

IV

River, that stealest with such silent pace
Around the City of the Dead,¹ where lies
A friend who bore thy name, and whom these eyes
Shall see no more in his accustomed place,
Linger and fold him in thy soft embrace,
And say good night, for now the western skies
Are red with sunset, and gray mists arise
Like damps that gather on a dead man's face.
Good night! good night! as we so oft have said
Beneath this roof at midnight, in the days
That are no more, and shall no more return.
Thou hast but taken thy lamp and gone to bed;
I stay a little longer, as one stays
To cover up the embers that still burn.

V

The doors are all wide open; at the gate
The blossomed lilacs counterfeit a blaze,
And seem to warm the air; a dreamy haze
Hangs o'er the Brighton meadows like a fate,

¹ Mount Auburn Cemetery lies near the river bank.

THE HERONS OF ELMWOOD

And on their margin, with sea-tides elate,
The flooded Charles, as in the happier days,
Writes the last letter of his name, and stays
His restless steps, as if compelled to wait.
I also wait; but they will come no more,
Those friends of mine, whose presence satisfied
The thirst and hunger of my heart. Ah me!
They have forgotten the pathway to my door!
Something is gone from nature since they died,
And summer is not summer, nor can be.

THE HERONS OF ELMWOOD

WARM and still is the summer night,
As here by the river's brink I wander;
White overhead are the stars, and white
The glimmering lamps on the hillside yonder.

Silent are all the sounds of day;
Nothing I hear but the chirp of crickets,
And the cry of the herons winging their way
O'er the poet's house in the Elmwood¹ thickets.

Call to him, herons, as slowly you pass
To your roosts in the haunts of the exiled thrushes,
Sing him the song of the green morass,
And the tides that water the reeds and rushes.

¹ Elmwood, a short distance from Longfellow's house, was the home of his brother poet and friend, James Russell Lowell.

THE HERONS OF ELMWOOD

Sing him the mystical Song of the Hern,
And the secret that baffles our utmost seeking;
For only a sound of lament we discern,
And cannot interpret the words you are speaking.

Sing of the air, and the wild delight
Of wings that uplift and winds that uphold you,
The joy of freedom, the rapture of flight
Through the drift of the floating mists that enfold you;

Of the landscape lying so far below,
With its towns and rivers and desert places;
And the splendor of light above, and the glow
Of the limitless, blue, ethereal spaces.

Ask him if songs of the Troubadours,
Or of Minnesingers in old black-letter,
Sound in his ears more sweet than yours,
And if yours are not sweeter and wilder and better.

Sing to him, say to him, here at his gate,
Where the boughs of the stately elms are meeting,
Some one hath lingered to meditate,
And send him unseen this friendly greeting;

That many another hath done the same,
Though not by a sound was the silence broken;
The surest pledge of a deathless name
Is the silent homage of thoughts unspoken.

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

BETWEEN the dark and the daylight,
When the night is beginning to lower,
Comes a pause in the day's occupations,
That is known as the Children's Hour.

I hear in the chamber above me
The patter of little feet,
The sound of a door that is opened,
And voices soft and sweet.

From my study I see in the lamplight,
Descending the broad hall stair,
Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,
And Edith with golden hair.

A whisper, and then a silence:
Yet I know by their merry eyes,
They are plotting and planning together
To take me by surprise.

A sudden rush from the stairway,
A sudden raid from the hall!
By three doors left unguarded
They enter my castle wall!

They climb up into my turret,
O'er the arms and back of my chair;

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

If I try to escape, they surround me;
They seem to be everywhere.

They almost devour me with kisses,
Their arms about me entwine,
Till I think of the Bishop of Bingen¹
In his Mouse-Tower on the Rhine!

Do you think, O blue-eyed banditti,
Because you have scaled the wall,
Such an old moustache as I am
Is not a match for you all?

I have you fast in my fortress,
And will not let you depart,
But put you down into the dungeon
In the round-tower of my heart.

And there will I keep you forever,
Yes, forever and a day,
Till the walls shall crumble to ruin,
And moulder in dust away!

¹ Near Bingen on the Rhine is a little square Mouse-Tower, so called from an old word meaning toll, since it was used as a toll-house; but there is an old tradition that a certain Bishop Hatto, who had been cruel to the people, was attacked in the tower by a great army of rats and mice. See Southey's famous poem, *Bishop Hatto*.

TRAVELS BY THE FIRESIDE

TRAVELS BY THE FIRESIDE

THE ceaseless rain is falling fast,
And yonder gilded vane,
Immovable for three days past,
Points to the misty main.

It drives me in upon myself
And to the fireside gleams,
To pleasant books that crowd my shelf,
And still more pleasant dreams.

I read whatever bards have sung
Of lands beyond the sea,
And the bright days when I was young
Come thronging back to me.

In fancy I can hear again
The Alpine torrent's roar,
The mule-bells on the hills of Spain,
The sea at Elsinore.

I see the convent's gleaming wall
Rise from its groves of pine,
And towers of old cathedrals tall,
And castles by the Rhine.

I journey on by park and spire,
Beneath centennial trees,

AMALFI

Through fields with poppies all on fire,
And gleams of distant seas.

I fear no more the dust and heat,
No more I feel fatigue,
While journeying with another's feet
O'er many a lengthening league.

Let others traverse sea and land,
And toil through various climes,
I turn the world round with my hand
Reading these poets' rhymes.

From them I learn whatever lies
Beneath each changing zone,
And see, when looking with their eyes,
Better than with mine own.

AMALFI

SWEET the memory is to me
Of a land beyond the sea,
Where the waves and mountains meet,
Where amid her mulberry-trees
Sits Amalfi in the heat,
Bathing ever her white feet
In the tideless summer seas.

In the middle of the town,
From its fountains in the hills,

AMALFI

Tumbling through the narrow gorge,
The Canneto rushes down,
Turns the great wheels of the mills,
Lifts the hammers of the forge.

'T is a stairway, not a street,
That ascends the deep ravine,
Where the torrent leaps between
Rocky walls that almost meet.
Toiling up from stair to stair
Peasant girls their burdens bear;
Sunburnt daughters of the soil,
Stately figures tall and straight,
What inexorable fate
Dooms them to this life of toil?

Lord of vineyards and of lands,
Far above the convent stands.
On its terraced walk aloof
Leans a monk with folded hands.
Placid, satisfied, serene,
Looking down upon the scene
Over wall and red-tiled roof;
Wondering unto what good end
All this toil and traffic tend,
And why all men cannot be
Free from care and free from pain,
And the sordid love of gain,
And as indolent as he.

AMALFI

Where are now the freighted barks
From the marts of east and west?
Where the knights in iron sarks
Journeying to the Holy Land,
Glove of steel upon the hand,
Cross of crimson on the breast?
Where the pomp of camp and court?
Where the pilgrims with their prayers?
Where the merchants with their wares,
And their gallant brigantines
Safely sailing into port
Chased by corsair Algerines?

Vanished like a fleet of cloud,
Like a passing trumpet-blast,
Are those splendors of the past,
And the commerce and the crowd!
Fathoms deep beneath the seas
Lie the ancient wharves and quays,
Swallowed by the engulfing waves;
Silent streets and vacant halls,
Ruined roofs and towers and walls;
Hidden from all mortal eyes
Deep the sunken city lies:
Even cities have their graves!

This is an enchanted land!
Round the headlands far away
Sweeps the blue Salernian bay

AMALFI

With its sickle of white sand:
Further still and furthermost
On the dim discovered coast
Pæstum with its ruins lies,
And its roses all in bloom
Seem to tinge the fatal skies
Of that lonely land of doom.

On his terrace, high in air,
Nothing doth the good monk care
For such worldly themes as these.
From the garden just below
Little puffs of perfume blow,
And a sound is in his ears
Of the murmur of the bees
In the shining chestnut-trees;
Nothing else he heeds or hears.
All the landscape seems to swoon
In the happy afternoon;
Slowly o'er his senses creep
The encroaching waves of sleep,
And he sinks as sank the town,
Unresisting, fathoms down,
Into caverns cool and deep!

Walled about with drifts of snow,
Hearing the fierce north-wind blow,
Seeing all the landscape white
And the river cased in ice,
Comes this memory of delight,

CASTLES IN SPAIN

Comes this vision unto me
Of a long-lost Paradise
In the land beyond the sea.

CASTLES IN SPAIN

How much of my young heart, O Spain,
Went out to thee in days of yore!
What dreams romantic filled my brain,
And summoned back to life again
The Paladins of Charlemagne,
The Cid Campeador!

And shapes more shadowy than these,
In the dim twilight half revealed;
Phœnician galleys on the seas,
The Roman camps like hives of bees,
The Goth uplifting from his knees
Pelayo on his shield.

It was these memories perchance,
From annals of remotest eld,
That lent the colors of romance
To every trivial circumstance,
And changed the form and countenance
Of all that I beheld.

Old towns, whose history lies hid
In monkish chronicle or rhyme, —

CASTLES IN SPAIN

Burgos, the birthplace of the Cid,
Zamora and Valladolid,
Toledo, built and walled amid
The wars of Wamba's time;

The long, straight line of the highway,
The distant town that seems so near,
The peasants in the fields, that stay
Their toil to cross themselves and pray,
When from the belfry at midday
The Angelus they hear;

White crosses in the mountain pass,
Mules gay with tassels, the loud din
Of muleteers, the tethered ass
That crops the dusty wayside grass,
And cavaliers with spurs of brass
Alighting at the inn;

White hamlets hidden in fields of wheat,
White cities slumbering by the sea,
White sunshine flooding square and street,
Dark mountain ranges, at whose feet
The river beds are dry with heat,—
All was a dream to me.

Yet something sombre and severe
O'er the enchanted landscape reigned;
A terror in the atmosphere
As if King Philip listened near,

CASTLES IN SPAIN

Or Torquemada, the austere,
His ghostly sway maintained.

The softer Andalusian skies
Dispelled the sadness and the gloom;
There Cadiz by the seaside lies,
And Seville's orange-orchards rise,
Making the land a paradise
Of beauty and of bloom.

There Cordova is hidden among
The palm, the olive, and the vine;
Gem of the South, by poets sung,
And in whose mosque Almanzor hung
As lamps the bells that once had rung
At Compostella's shrine.

But over all the rest supreme,
The star of stars, the cynosure,
The artist's and the poet's theme,
The young man's vision, the old man's dream,—
Granada by its winding stream,
The city of the Moor!

And there the Alhambra still recalls
Aladdin's palace of delight:
Allah il Allah! through its halls
Whispers the fountain as it falls,
The Darro darts beneath its walls,
The hills with snow are white.

FROM MY ARM-CHAIR

Ah yes, the hills are white with snow,
And cold with blasts that bite and freeze;
But in the happy vale below
The orange and pomegranate grow,
And wafts of air toss to and fro
The blossoming almond trees.

The Vega cleft by the Xenil,
The fascination and allure
Of the sweet landscape chains the will;
The traveller lingers on the hill,
His parted lips are breathing still
The last sigh of the Moor.

How like a ruin overgrown
With flowers that hide the rents of time,
Stands now the Past that I have known;
Castles in Spain, not built of stone
But of white summer clouds, and blown
Into this little mist of rhyme!

FROM MY ARM-CHAIR

TO THE CHILDREN OF CAMBRIDGE

WHO PRESENTED TO ME, ON MY SEVENTY-SECOND BIRTHDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1879, THIS CHAIR MADE FROM THE WOOD OF THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH'S CHESTNUT-TREE

AM I a king, that I should call my own
This splendid ebon throne?

FROM MY ARM-CHAIR

Or by what reason, or what right divine,
Can I proclaim it mine?

Only, perhaps, by right divine of song
It may to me belong;
Only because the spreading chestnut-tree
Of old was sung by me.

Well I remember it in all its prime
When in the summer-time
The affluent foliage of its branches made
A cavern of cool shade.

There, by the blacksmith's forge, beside the street,
Its blossoms white and sweet
Enticed the bees, until it seemed alive,
And murmured like a hive.

And when the winds of autumn, with a shout,
Tossed its great arms about,
The shining chestnuts, bursting from the sheath,
Dropped to the ground beneath.

And now some fragments of its branches bare,
Shaped as a stately chair,
Have by my hearthstone found a home at last,
And whisper of the past.

The Danish king could not in all his pride
Repel the ocean tide,

FROM MY ARM-CHAIR

But, seated in this chair, I can in rhyme
 Roll back the tide of Time.

I see again, as one in vision sees,
 The blossoms and the bees,
And hear the children's voices shout and call,
 And the brown chestnuts fall.

I see the smithy with its fires aglow,
 I hear the bellows blow,
And the shrill hammers on the anvil beat
 The iron white with heat!

And thus, dear children, have ye made for me
 This day a jubilee,
And to my more than threescore years and ten
 Brought back my youth again.

The heart hath its own memory, like the mind,
 And in it are enshrined
The precious keepsakes, into which is wrought
 The giver's loving thought.

Only your love and your remembrance could
 Give life to this dead wood,
And make these branches, leafless now so long,
 Blossom again in song.

POSSIBILITIES—CROSS OF SNOW

POSSIBILITIES

WHERE are the Poets, unto whom belong
The Olympian heights; whose singing shafts were
sent
Straight to the mark, and not from bows half bent,
But with the utmost tension of the thong?
Where are the stately argosies of song,
Whose rushing keels made music as they went
Sailing in search of some new continent,
With all sail set, and steady winds and strong?
Perhaps there lives some dreamy boy, untaught
In schools, some graduate of the field or street
Who shall become a master of the art,
An admiral sailing the high seas of thought,
Fearless and first, and steering with his fleet
For lands not yet laid down in any chart.

THE CROSS OF SNOW

IN the long, sleepless watches of the night,
A gentle face — the face of one long dead —
Looks at me from the wall, where round its head
The night-lamp casts a halo of pale light.
Here in this room she died; and soul more white
Never through martyrdom of fire was led
To its repose; nor can in books be read
The legend of a life more benedight.

PALINGENESIS

There is a mountain in the distant West
That, sun-defying, in its deep ravines
Displays a cross of snow upon its side.
Such is the cross I wear upon my breast
These eighteen years, through all the changing scenes
And seasons, changeless since the day she died.

PALINGENESIS

I LAY upon the headland-height, and listened
To the incessant sobbing of the sea
In caverns under me,
And watched the waves, that tossed and fled and glis-
tened,
Until the rolling meadows of amethyst
Melted away in mist.

Then suddenly, as one from sleep, I started;
For round about me all the sunny capes
Seemed peopled with the shapes
Of those whom I had known in days departed,
Apparelled in the loveliness which gleams
On faces seen in dreams.

A moment only, and the light and glory
Faded away, and the disconsolate shore
Stood lonely as before;
And the wild-roses of the promontory
Around me shuddered in the wind, and shed
Their petals of pale red.

PALINGENESIS

There was an old belief that in the embers
Of all things their primordial form exists,
And cunning alchemists
Could re-create the rose with all its members
From its own ashes, but without the bloom,
Without the lost perfume.

Ah me! what wonder-working, occult science
Can from the ashes in our hearts once more
The rose of youth restore?
What craft of alchemy can bid defiance
To time and change, and for a single hour
Renew this phantom-flower?

“Oh, give me back,” I cried, “the vanished splendors,
The breath of morn, and the exultant strife,
When the swift stream of life
Bounds o'er its rocky channel, and surrenders
The pond, with all its lilies, for the leap
Into the unknown deep!”

And the sea answered, with a lamentation,
Like some old prophet wailing, and it said,
“Alas! thy youth is dead!
It breathes no more, its heart has no pulsation;
In the dark places with the dead of old
It lies forever cold!”

Then said I, “From its consecrated cerements
I will not drag this sacred dust again,
Only to give me pain;

PALINGENESIS

But, still remembering all the lost endearments,
Go on my way, like one who looks before,
And turns to weep no more."

Into what land of harvests, what plantations
Bright with autumnal foliage and the glow
Of sunsets burning low;
Beneath what midnight skies, whose constellations
Light up the spacious avenues between
This world and the unseen;

Amid what friendly greetings and caresses,
What households, though not alien, yet not mine,
What bowers of rest divine;
To what temptations in lone wildernesses,
What famine of the heart, what pain and loss,
The bearing of what cross, —

I do not know; nor will I vainly question
Those pages of the mystic book which hold
The story still untold,
But without rash conjecture or suggestion
Turn its last leaves in reverence and good heed,
Until "The End" I read.

MORITURI SALUTAMUS

MORITURI, SALUTAMUS

POEM FOR THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
CLASS OF 1825 IN BOWDOIN COLLEGE

"O CAESAR, we who are about to die
Salute you!" was the gladiators' cry
In the arena, standing face to face
With death and with the Roman populace.

O ye familiar scenes, — ye groves of pine,
That once were mine and are no longer mine, —
Thou river, widening through the meadows green
To the vast sea, so near and yet unseen, —
Ye halls, in whose seclusion and repose
Phantoms of fame, like exhalations, rose
And vanished, — we who are about to die
Salute you; earth and air and sea and sky,
And the Imperial Sun that scatters down
His sovereign splendors upon grove and town.

Ye do not answer us! ye do not hear!
We are forgotten; and in your austere
And calm indifference, ye little care
Whether we come or go, or whence or where.
What passing generations fill these halls,
What passing voices echo from these walls,
Ye heed not; we are only as the blast,
A moment heard, and then forever past.

MORITURI SALUTAMUS

Not so the teachers who in earlier days
Led our bewildered feet through learning's maze;
They answer us — alas! what have I said?
What greetings come there from the voiceless dead?
What salutation, welcome, or reply?
What pressure from the hands that lifeless lie?
They are no longer here; they all are gone
Into the land of shadows, — all save one.
Honor and reverence, and the good repute
That follows faithful service as its fruit,
Be unto him, whom living we salute.

The great Italian poet, when he made
His dreadful journey to the realms of shade,
Met there the old instructor of his youth,
And cried in tones of pity and of ruth:
“Oh, never from the memory of my heart
Your dear, paternal image shall depart,
Who while on earth, ere yet by death surprised,
Taught me how mortals are immortalized;
How grateful am I for that patient care
All my life long my language shall declare.”

To-day we make the poet's words our own,
And utter them in plaintive undertone;
Nor to the living only be they said,
But to the other living called the dead,
Whose dear, paternal images appear
Not wrapped in gloom, but robed in sunshine here;

MORITURI SALUTAMUS

Whose simple lives, complete and without flaw,
Were part and parcel of great Nature's law;
Who said not to their Lord, as if afraid,
"Here is thy talent in a napkin laid,"
But labored in their sphere, as men who live
In the delight that work alone can give.
Peace be to them! eternal peace and rest,
And the fulfilment of the great behest:
"Ye have been faithful over a few things,
Over ten cities shall ye reign as kings."

And ye who fill the places we once filled,
And follow in the furrows that we tilled,
Young men, whose generous hearts are beating high,
We who are old, and are about to die,
Salute you; hail you; take your hands in ours,
And crown you with our welcome as with flowers!
How beautiful is youth! how bright it gleams
With its illusions, aspirations, dreams!
Book of Beginnings, Story without End,
Each maid a heroine, and each man a friend!
Aladdin's Lamp, and Fortunatus' Purse
That holds the treasures of the universe!
All possibilities are in its hands,
No danger daunts it, and no foe withstands;
In its sublime audacity of faith,
"Be thou removed!" it to the mountain saith,
And with ambitious feet, secure and proud,
Ascends the ladder leaning on the cloud!

MORITURI SALUTAMUS

As ancient Priam at the Scæan gate
Sat on the walls of Troy in regal state
With the old men, too old and weak to fight,
Chirping like grasshoppers in their delight
To see the embattled hosts, with spear and shield,
Of Trojans and Achaians in the field;
So from the snowy summits of our years
We see you in the plain, as each appears,
And question of you; asking, "Who is he
That towers above the others? Which may be
Atreides, Menelaus, Odysseus,
Ajax the great, or bold Idomeneus?"

Let him not boast who puts his armor on
As he who puts it off, the battle done.
Study yourselves; and most of all note well
Wherein kind Nature meant you to excel.
Not every blossom ripens into fruit;
Minerva, the inventress of the flute,
Flung it aside, when she her face surveyed
Distorted in a fountain as she played;
The unlucky Marsyas found it, and his fate
Was one to make the bravest hesitate.

Write on your doors the saying wise and old,
"Be bold! be bold!" and everywhere, "Be bold;
Be not too bold!" Yet better the excess
Than the defect; better the more than less;
Better like Hector in the field to die,
Than like a perfumed Paris turn and fly.

MORITURI SALUTAMUS

And now, my classmates; ye remaining few
That number not the half of those we knew,
Ye, against whose familiar names not yet
The fatal asterisk of death is set,
Ye I salute! The horologe of Time
Strikes the half-century with a solemn chime,
And summons us together once again,
The joy of meeting not unmixed with pain.

Where are the others? Voices from the deep
Caverns of darkness answer me: "They sleep!"
I name no names; instinctively I feel
Each at some well-remembered grave will kneel,
And from the inscription wipe the weeds and moss,
For every heart best knoweth its own loss.
I see their scattered gravestones gleaming white
Through the pale dusk of the impending night;
O'er all alike the impartial sunset throws
Its golden lilies mingled with the rose;
We give to each a tender thought, and pass
Out of the graveyards with their tangled grass,
Unto these scenes frequented by our feet
When we were young, and life was fresh and sweet.

What shall I say to you? What can I say
Better than silence is? When I survey
This throng of faces turned to meet my own,
Friendly and fair, and yet to me unknown,
Transformed the very landscape seems to be;
It is the same, yet not the same to me.

MORITURI SALUTAMUS

So many memories crowd upon my brain,
So many ghosts are in the wooded plain,
I fain would steal away, with noiseless tread,
As from a house where some one lieth dead.
I cannot go; — I pause; — I hesitate;
My feet reluctant linger at the gate;
As one who struggles in a troubled dream
To speak and cannot, to myself I seem.

Vanish the dream! Vanish the idle fears!
Vanish the rolling mists of fifty years!
Whatever time or space may intervene,
I will not be a stranger in this scene.
Here every doubt, all indecision, ends;
Hail, my companions, comrades, classmates, friends!

Ah me! the fifty years since last we met
Seem to me fifty folios bound and set
By Time, the great transcriber, on his shelves,
Wherein are written the histories of ourselves.
What tragedies, what comedies, are there;
What joy and grief, what rapture and despair!
What chronicles of triumph and defeat,
Of struggle, and temptation, and retreat!
What records of regrets, and doubts, and fears!
What pages blotted, blistered by our tears!
What lovely landscapes on the margin shine,
What sweet, angelic faces, what divine
And holy images of love and trust,
Undimmed by age, unsoiled by damp or dust!

MORITURI SALUTAMUS

Whose hand shall dare to open and explore
These volumes, closed and clasped forevermore?
Not mine. With reverential feet I pass;
I hear a voice that cries, "Alas! alas!
Whatever hath been written shall remain,
Nor be erased nor written o'er again;
The unwritten only still belongs to thee:
Take heed, and ponder well what that shall be."

As children frightened by a thunder-cloud
Are reassured if some one reads aloud
A tale of wonder, with enchantment fraught,
Or wild adventure, that diverts their thought,
Let me endeavor with a tale to chase
The gathering shadows of the time and place,
And banish what we all too deeply feel
Wholly to say, or wholly to conceal.

In mediæval Rome, I know not where,
There stood an image with its arm in air,
And on its lifted finger, shining clear,
A golden ring with the device, "Strike here!"
Greatly the people wondered, though none guessed
The meaning that these words but half expressed,
Until a learned clerk, who at noonday
With downcast eye was passing on his way,
Paused, and observed the spot, and marked it well,
Whereon the shadow of the finger fell;
And, coming back at midnight, delved, and found
A secret stairway leading under ground.

MORITURI SALUTAMUS

Down this he passed into a spacious hall,
Lit by a flaming jewel on the wall;
And opposite, in threatening attitude,
With bow and shaft a brazen statue stood.
Upon its forehead, like a coronet,
Were these mysterious words of menace set:
That which I am, I am; my fatal aim
None can escape, not even yon luminous flame!"

Midway the hall was a fair table placed,
With cloth of gold, and golden cups enchased
With rubies, and the plates and knives were gold,
And gold the bread and viands manifold.
Around it, silent, motionless, and sad,
Were seated gallant knights in armor clad,
And ladies beautiful with plume and zone,
But they were stone, their hearts within were stone;
And the vast hall was filled in every part
With silent crowds, stony in face and heart.

Long at the scene, bewildered and amazed,
The trembling clerk in speechless wonder gazed;
Then from the table, by his greed made bold,
He seized a goblet and a knife of gold,
And suddenly from their seats the guests upsprang,
The vaulted ceiling with loud clamors rang,
The archer sped his arrow, at their call,
Shattering the lambent jewel on the wall,
And all was dark around and overhead;—
Stark on the floor the luckless clerk lay dead!

MORITURI SALUTAMUS

The writer of this legend then records
Its ghostly application in these words:
The image is the Adversary old,
Whose beckoning finger points to realms of gold;
Our lusts and passions are the downward stair
That leads the soul from a diviner air;
The archer, Death; the flaming jewel, Life;
Terrestrial goods, the goblet and the knife;
The knights and ladies, all whose flesh and bone
By avarice have been hardened into stone;
The clerk, the scholar whom the love of pelf
Tempted from his books and from his nobler self.

The scholar and the world! The endless strife,
The discord in the harmonies of life!
The love of learning, the sequestered nooks,
And all the sweet serenity of books!
The market-place, the eager love of gain,
Whose aim is vanity, and whose end is pain!

But why, you ask me, should this tale be told
To men grown old, or who are growing old?
It is too late! Ah, nothing is too late
Till the tired heart shall cease to palpitate.
Cato learned Greek at eighty; Sophocles
Wrote his grand OEdipus, and Simonides
Bore off the prize of verse from his compeers,
When each had numbered more than fourscore years,
And Theophrastus at fourscore and ten,
Had but begun his Characters of Men.

MORITURI SALUTAMUS

Chaucer, at Woodstock with the nightingales,
At sixty wrote the Canterbury Tales;
Goethe at Weimar, toiling to the last,
Completed Faust when eighty years were past.
These are indeed exceptions; but they show
How far the gulf-stream of our youth may flow
Into the arctic regions of our lives,
Where little else than life itself survives.

As the barometer foretells the storm
While still the skies are clear, the weather warm,
So something in us, as old age draws near,
Betrays the pressure of the atmosphere.
The nimble mercury, ere we are aware,
Descends the elastic ladder of the air;
The telltale blood in artery and vein
Sinks from its higher levels in the brain;
Whatever poet, orator, or sage
May say of it, old age is still old age.
It is the waning, not the crescent moon;
The dusk of evening, not the blaze of noon;
It is not strength, but weakness; not desire,
But its surcease; not the fierce heat of fire,
The burning and consuming element,
But that of ashes and of embers spent,
In which some living sparks we still discern,
Enough to warm, but not enough to burn.

What then? Shall we sit idly down and say
The night hath come; it is no longer day?

MORITURI SALUTAMUS

The night hath not yet come; we are not quite
Cut off from labor by the failing light;
Something remains for us to do or dare;
Even the oldest tree some fruit may bear;
Not Oedipus Coloneus, or Greek Ode,
Or tales of pilgrims that one morning rode
Out of the gateway of the Tabard Inn,
But other something, would we but begin;
For age is opportunity, no less
Than youth itself, though in another dress,
And as the evening twilight fades away
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.







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